# READERS' Q&A: PAUL O'NEILL

**BTCC's race winner and motormouth tackles the MN posers P14**

THE VOICE OF BRITISH MOTORSPORT

MOTORSPORT NEWS

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*French world champion scorches to record-breaking triumph on WRC opener*

# EVANS: I HAVE MONTE WINNER OGIER IN MY SIGHTS

Ogier kicked off with another win

By Graham Lister

**Sebastien Ogier has set the standard Elfyn Evans must beat with victory on the season-opening Monte Carlo Rally last Sunday.**

Ogier's first place – a new record eighth triumph on the event and his 50th in the World Rally Championship – plus a powerstage win, has secured a nine-point lead over Welshman Evans, whom Ogier beat to last year's WRC crown.

"It's been good but Seb was better," Evans said after finishing second to his factory Toyota team-mate. "Of course, it's his home rally so it was always going to be tough, [but] I would have preferred to be a little more competitive against him, our target is to fight him."

Evans: encouraged

Second for Evans nevertheless bettered his previous Monte best result of third, while it was Toyota's first win on the event since Carlos Sainz topped the order in 1998 to make it a perfect start for new team boss Jari-Matti Latvala.

**Full story, P8.**

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Spare side gears, 18 tooth | each £32.50 | £39.00 |
| Motorsport plate kit | £83.90 | £100.68 |
| Wavy plate | each £16.30 | £19.56 |
| Atlas CWP, 3.4, 3.7, 4.6, 5.1 | £251.80 | £302.16 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Atlas axle casing, thick tube, double pinned & breather | £198.60 | £238.32 |
| Pig's head only | £165.00 | £198.00 |
| Axle end stubs, R/H & L/H thread | pair £49.90 | £59.88 |
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**Fully-floating axle kit £328.60 £394.38**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Fully floating hub assembly without shafts | pair £218.60 | £262.32 |
| Fully floating axle kit, inc.(2) F/F Hub assemblies plus (2) '4340' halfshafts,18 tooth (choice of length) | £328.60 | £394.38 |
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| *SPARES* | | |
| Studs | each5.90 | £7.08 |
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| Bearing, top quality | each £38.90 | £46.68 |
| 770mm '4340' halfshaft, 18 tooth | each £77.50 | £93.00 |
| 820mm '4340' halfshaft, 18 tooth | each £82.50 | £99.00 |

*All Blackline halfshafts Group 1 and Group 4 are manufactured from 4340 alloy steel and have induction hardened teeth to Rockwell 50 HRC specifications. 4340 is about twice as strong as 1040 (the material which OEM halfshafts are normally manufactured from). It has a high degree of ductility to absorb shock loadings of abrupt acceleration, taking some load off the differential and CWP. However, it has a very high yield strength to sustain high torque loads without failure. 4340 is the ideal halfshaft material.*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 266 x 21 'Forest' type discs | pair £159.00 | £190.80 |
| FBL 002 disc bells | pair £51.00 | £61.20 |
| Halfshaft flange, not F/F, suit std. axle | each £59.50 | £71.40 |

## ENGLISH AXLE PARTS, BLACKLINE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *English plate style diff (30/90 ramps) Available 18 tooth (mates with semi-floating conversion kit)* | £395.80 | £474.96 |
| *Available 22 tooth (mates with std. halfshaft)* | £395.80 | £474.96 |
| *Spare plate kit* | £39.50 | £47.40 |
| *Spare side gears, 18 or 22 tooth (please state)* | £32.50 | £39.00 |
| *English CWP 3.54, 3.7, 3.9, 4.1, 4.4, 4.7, 4.9, 5.1, 5.3* | £231.50 | £277.80 |
| *Spare side bearing, top quality* | £19.90 | £23.88 |
| *Crush washer* | £5.90 | £7.08 |
| *Crown wheel bearing* | £9.90 | £11.88 |
| *Pinion bearing* | £14.90 | £17.88 |
| *Atlas into English semi-floating hub kit, inc. (2) '4340' halfshafts, 18 tooth* | £443.80 | £532.56 |
| *English axle weld-on brace ring* | £39.90 | £47.88 |
| *Special 10mm axle brace, English axle* | £99.50 | £119.40 |
| *SPARES* | | |
| *Semi-floating hub assembly (less bearing)* | each £144.40 | £173.28 |
| *Bearing '4340'* | £48.90 | £59.76 |
| *Halfshaft, suit semi-floating kit* | £77.50 | £93.00 |
| *Flange, not semi-floating, suit std. axle* | £59.50 | £71.40 |
| *Flange, Group 1 type* | £59.50 | £71.40 |
| *Brake disc, 265 x 10* | each £34.50 | £41.40 |

## HELICAL LSDs, BLACKLINE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| English axle, Caterham, 22 spline | £324.00 | £388.80 |
| Atlas axle, 16 spline | £354.00 | £424.80 |
| Ford FWD - Escort, Fiesta, Focus, KA, Orion, Puma (BC/1B5 trans) | £399.00 | £478.80 |
| Sierra 7", Caterham | £399.00 | £478.80 |
| Focus ST170, Mini Cooper 'S' (6-speed Getrag box) | £399.00 | £478.80 |
| Mazda MX5 (94-05) | £399.00 | £478.80 |

## TRANSMISSION PARTS, BLACKLINE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 4-speed bearing type gearlever | £38.50 | £46.20 |
| 5-speed bearing type gearlever | £40.50 | £48.60 |
| 5-speed quickshift conversion kit | £13.50 | £16.20 |
| M10 ally 'Pro' gearknob | £14.90 | £17.88 |
| M10 white or black nylon gearknob | £12.50 | £15.00 |
| Propshaft, Type 9 - English or Atlas axle | £89.50 | £107.40 |

**Wilwood brakes kits from £299.51 £359.41**

**Mk2 Front Wing £72.10 £86.52**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mk1 Mexico front wing, LH or RH | each | £265.22 | £318.27 |
| Mk2 front wing, LH or RH, std. | each | £72.10 | £86.52 |
| Mk2 front wing, LH or RH, RS2000 | each | £175.00 | £210.00 |

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*X-Flow ally radiator* £179.60 £215.52
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*13/235 oil cooler* 50.10 £60.12

*Lockable fuel filler cap assembly* £49.50 £59.40

*Silicone hose kit, Mexico or RS2000 (available blue, black or red)* £62.34 £74.81

## ESCORT BRAKING PARTS

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *Wilwood brakes kit, 265x10, Powerlite caliper* | £299.51 | £359.41 |
| *Wilwood brakes kit, 247x20, Midilite caliper* | £468.49 | £562.19 |
| *Wilwood brakes kit, 285x21, Midilite caliper* | £571.40 | £685.68 |
| *Balance bar pedal box, cable clutch* | £189.50 | £227.40 |
| *Balance bar pedal box, hydraulic clutch* | £215.00 | £258.00 |
| *RMD master cylinders* | from £21.50 | £25.80 |
| *Wilwood master cylinders* | from £29.50 | £35.40 |
| *Wilwood proportioning valve, knob* | £42.50 | £51.00 |
| *Wilwood proprtioning valve, lever* | £57.50 | £69.00 |
| *Blackline 'swaged' stainless brake lines, 3-line* | £29.74 | £35.69 |
| *Classic Ford wheels 6x13* | £69.00 | £82.80 |
| *7x13* | £76.00 | £91.20 |
| *8x13* | £87.50 | £105.00 |
| *8x15* | £99.00 | £118.80 |

**Classic Ford wheels from £69.00 £82.80**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Poly' bump stops, top axle mounting* | pair | £8.12 | £9.75 |
| *Escort 11/1300 front springs, 145-220lbs* | pair | £33.80 | £40.56 |
| *Escort RS front springs, 145-220lbs* | pair | £33.80 | £40.56 |
| *1.9" & 2.25" coil springs, 20,000 in stock!* | | from £15.90 | £19.08 |
| *Adjustable spring seat kit* | | £24.50 | £29.40 |
| *Helper spring adaptor, 2.25"-2.25"* | | £10.50 | £12.60 |
| *Gaz, adjustable front shocks* | each | £67.60 | £81.12 |
| *Gaz, adjustable (3-way) front shocks* | each | £299.50 | £359.40 |
| *Gaz, adjustable rate rear shocks* | each | £65.00 | £78.00 |
| *Quick steering racks* | RH 2:9 ratio | £119.50 | £143.40 |
| | RH 2:4 ratio | £139.50 | £167.40 |
| | LH 2:4 ratio | £149.50 | £179.40 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *H/duty quick steering racks* | RH 2:4 ratio | £174.50 | £209.40 |
| | RH 2:2 ratio | £204.50 | £245.40 |
| | LH 2:4 ratio | £184.50 | £225.40 |
| | LH 2:2 ratio | £214.50 | £257.40 |
| *OEM style steering rack mounts* | pair | £16.80 | £20.16 |
| *Roller bearing top mount - spherical bearing,* | each | £49.50 | £59.40 |
| *Roller bearing top mount - roller bearing,* | each | £49.50 | £59.40 |
| *Roller bearin plastic dust covers* | pair | £9.50 | £11.40 |
| *Spherical bearing race type top mounts* | pair | £49.60 | £59.52 |

**OEM TCA's £63.50 £76.20**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *TCA's 'Pattern' style* | pair | £36.50 | £43.80 |
| *TCA's 'OEM' style* | pair | £63.50 | £76.20 |
| *TCA bush insertion tool* | | £14.90 | £17.88 |
| *Twin cam anti-roll bar* | | £59.50 | £71.40 |
| *Anti-dive kit* | | £31.00 | £37.20 |
| *World cup X-member* | | £106.50 | £127.80 |
| *World cup mounts* | pair | £28.50 | £34.20 |
| *RS2000 track rod ends* | each | £10.50 | £12.60 |
| *Group 4 style all steel U/J coupling* | | £19.80 | £23.76 |
| *4-link kit* | | £119.50 | £143.40 |
| *Heavy duty 4-link kit* | | £185.00 | £222.00 |
| *Group 4 round turret kit* | kit | £65.00 | £78.00 |
| *Mk1 spring shackles* | car set | £17.00 | £20.40 |
| *Mk2 spring shackles* | car set | £23.50 | £28.20 |
| *OEM Escort RS struts* | each | £96.95 | £116.34 |
| *Group 4 spec. front RS struts* | each | £128.00 | £153.60 |
| *Escort RS stub axles* | pair | £130.00 | £156.00 |
| *RS steering arms* | pair | £69.50 | £83.40 |
| *Heavy duty steering arms, gusseted* | pair | £79.50 | £95.40 |
| *Quick fit steering arm kit* | pair | £9.60 | £11.52 |
| *Ally hubs - standard or Group 4* | each | £49.50 | £59.40 |
| *Stub axle hardware kit* | | £10.90 | £13.08 |
| *Watts linkage kit* | | £199.50 | £239.40 |
| *Taper leaf springs, 146lb rate* | each | £49.50 | £59.40 |
| *Ally tube strut brace, round tube* | | £44.90 | £53.88 |
| *Work style 60mm oval tube strut brace* | | £51.50 | £61.80 |
| *Rear lamp protectors* | pair | £12.90 | £15.48 |
| *Chassis mounted sump guard, wet sump* | | £137.00 | £164.40 |
| *Kaylan mudflaps, 4mm (500x300)* | pair | £16.50 | £19.80 |
| *Body jacking kit* | car set | £119.50 | £143.40 |
| *Ford hub nut socket, 3/4"D, 65mm* | | £13.90 | £16.68 |

**WCP Interupter pump £29.00 £34.80**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *WCP interupter fuel pump* | | £29.00 | £34.80 |
| *WCP solid state fuel pump* | | £19.00 | £22.80 |
| *WCP injection fuel pump* | from | £32.19 | £38.63 |
| *Bonnet pin kits, stainless* | | £5.00 | £6.00 |
| *Bonnet pin kits, alloy* | | £7.00 | £8.40 |
| *Aerocatch* | from | £31.00 | £37.20 |
| *Avanti map light* | from | £19.50 | £23.40 |
| *Manifold wrap, 2" x 15 metres (50ft), Vermiculite* | | £29.60 | £35.52 |
| *Roll cage padding, 3ft, B1 fire rating* | | £6.00 | £7.20 |

**M16 Calipers from £89.00 £106.80**

*M16 calipers to fit standard discs, pair* £89.00 £106.80
*M16 calipers to fit vented discs (no spacers needed), pair* £98.50 £118.20
*M16 caliper, shouldered bolts, set of 4* £10.99 £13.19
*Group 1 vented discs (247x20, pair* £39.00 £46.80

*4.25 ltr FIA plumbed-in fire system, full installation kit, FIA homologation EX 037.13* Kit £159.80 £191.76

## Escort Laminated & Heated Screens

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Escort Mk1 front laminated screen (incl. rubber) | £69.50 | £83.40 |
| Escort Mk2 front laminated screen (incl. rubber) | £69.50 | £83.40 |
| Escort Mk1 front heated laminated screen (inc. rubber) | £198.60 | £238.32 |
| Escort Mk2 Front heated laminated screen (inc. rubber) | £198.60 | £238.32 |
| Escort Mk1 front screen rubber | £24.92 | £29.90 |
| Escort Mk1 rear screen rubber | £23.92 | £28.70 |
| Escort Mk2 front screen rubber | £29.08 | £34.90 |
| Escort Mk2 rear screen rubber | £29.08 | £34.90 |
| Laser windscreen chip repair kit | £13.90 | £16.68 |
| 14" or 17" rear view mirror | £14.90 | £17.88 |

## Escort Mk2 Rubber Parts

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bonnet bump stop | pair | £6.20 | £7.44 |
| Bonnet rail bump stop, set of 4 | | £10.90 | £13.08 |
| Bonnet bump stop, centre-rear | | £5.10 | £6.12 |
| Wiring loom bulkhead grommet | | £6.90 | £8.28 |
| Bonnet release cable grommet | | £5.20 | £6.24 |
| Steering column bulkhead grommet | | £7.20 | £8.64 |
| Handbrake backplate dust boots | pair | £7.10 | £8.52 |
| Spedo cable bulkhead grommet | | £5.20 | £6.24 |
| Throttle pedal pad | | £5.20 | £6.24 |
| Brake and clutch pedal pads | pair | £8.00 | £9.60 |
| Shock absorber top caps | pair | £13.90 | £16.68 |
| Rear bumper side plugs, set of 4 | | £9.90 | £11.88 |
| Oil line bulkhead grommet | | £5.10 | £6.12 |
| Brake servo rod bellows | | £5.20 | £6.24 |

**PLEASE NOTE: All prices in Red are EXCLUSIVE OF VAT**

# COMMENT

Photos: Hyundai Motorsport, Toyota Gazoo Racing, Jakob Ebrey, Motorsport Images, Conor Edwards Photography

The World Rally Championship men kicked their season off on a snowy Monte Carlo

# THE WRC BEATS THE PANDEMIC

**For competitors, it must hardly seem like they've been away. But for fans, the opening round of the World Rally Championship in Monte Carlo last weekend was a blessed relief.**

There were some very serious concerns in the build-up to WRC opener that the event would not take place at all. Increasing fears over the global health pandemic put a serious question mark over the travel arrangements of the teams, but hard work by the teams, organisers and promoters finally made it happen.

Congratulations go to the World champion Sebastien Ogier, but a tip of the hat also goes to the two leading Brits, Elfyn Evans and Gus Greensmith. Evans pushed his Toyota team-mate Ogier all the way and Greensmith banished memories of a slip-up 12 months beforehand to land some points in his M-Sport Ford Fiesta. It looks like it will be a season where the Union flag can again fly high.

Also in this issue, Graham Keilloh looks at the admirable story of an enthusiast who is intent on preserving the memory of the Birmingham Superprix. The through-the-streets event, which was one of the first UK closed-road competitions in the modern era, only had five editions from 1986 to 1990, but it is seared into the brains of all who either raced on the circuit, stood trackside, volunteered or tried to run a race car. There can't be many events which have drawn Juan Manuel Fangio, Jack Brabham and Nigel Mansell to a veg market in the Midlands.

Elsewhere, Luke Barry is in reflective mood too as he looks back at the gentleman and rally competitor Bertie Fisher, who was sadly taken from us just two decades ago. We hear that not only was Fisher a man who had fearsome speed on the stages, but a generous spirit too which endeared him to those who went up against him and benefited from his kindness.

Our question-and-answer session guest this week is racer-turned-commentator Paul O'Neill in one of the most open and honest interviews we've ever done.

He talks about his struggle to shake off the image of merely being a Spice Boy, in the shadow of his big sister Mel C, to forging a long-lasting career in the paddocks and service parks of the UK. He's never enjoyed his life as much as he does now behind the microphone calling the BTCC support races and offering expert insight into ITV4's excellent British Touring Car Championship race day coverage.

**Matt James**
Editor, Motorsport News
matt.james@kelsey.co.uk

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# RACING NEWS

Photos: Motorsport Images, Jakob Ebrey

## IN BRIEF

### Ocon on stage

Alpine Formula 1 driver Esteban Ocon took part on two stages of last weekend's Monte Carlo Rally as a demonstration run in an Alpine A110S machine. The event was the 110th anniversary of the rally and it also marked 50 years since the French car firm finished 1-2-3 in the event. Ocon said: "It's been a dream of mine to have a go at rallying so to have a taste of it at a brilliant event like this was definitely special."

### IndyCar pushed back

The first round of the IndyCar Series has been further delayed. The initial opening round at St Petersburg was axed and the US category was set to get the green light at Barber Motorsports Park on April 11. However, this date has now been pushed back to April 18, meaning that the beginning of the schedule will feature four rounds in just 15 days, including a double header at Texas Motor Speedway on May 1-2.

### WTCR's Ring date

The World TCR fixtures have been released and the eight-event roster kicks off with a round at the Nurburgring Nordschleife on June 3-5. The series will remain in Europe and take in rounds in Portugal, Spain, Italy and Hungary before heading for the Far East. The season ends in Macau on November 19-21.

### Armstrong at DAMS

Ferrari Junior driver Marcus Armstrong has joined the DAMS team for this season's FIA Formula 2 Championship. The Kiwi took two podiums during his maiden campaign with ART in 2020 and finished 13th in the points. "DAMS has a massive history, especially in GP2 and F2 – it's one of best, if not the best, to be with," said Armstrong.

### FE goes Chile

Chilean officials have announced that Formula E will host a round on the Santiago course in June this year. The country was due to host the opening rounds, a double-header, in January in a reworked calendar, but these were delayed amid the growing concerns over the health pandemic. Now, however, the boss of the country's motorsport federation has said that the double header will take place on June 5-6.

### DTM legends

The DTM Classic organisation has coordinated a six-round Touring Car Legends competition, which will feature cars from the 1980s and 1990s. It will support the DTM over the course of 2021. Two 30-minute races will be hosted at each event. It is hoped that former star names from the category will sign up to take part.

### De Silvestro at Indy

Simona de Silvestro will front a new all-female led IndyCar team in 2021. Paretta Autosport, headed by Beth Paretta, will have technical links with Penske and the attack will use Chevrolet power. Paretta has sought Indy 500 entry before: she was the head of Grace Autosport, which Briton Katherine Legge drove for in 2016 before the project was cancelled.

Butcher will swap to Toyota Corolla

The Scotsman is a six-time race winner in the BTCC

# BUTCHER JOINS SPEEDWORKS TOYOTA FOR 2021 BTCC ATTACK

## Scotsman links up with Sam Smelt in expanded two-car assault this season

By Matt James

**Rory Butcher will lead the Toyota attack on the British Touring Car Championship this season after securing a deal to drive with Speedworks Motorsport in a factory-backed Corolla.**

The Scotsman, a six-time winner in the BTCC, will be joined in the hatchback by BTCC returnee Sam Smelt, who switches over from Speedworks' British GT assault. Speedworks introduced the Team Toyota GB-supported Corolla into the BTCC at the start of the 2019 season and it has taken seven wins, all in the hands of Tom Ingram.

Butcher won the Independents Trophy in 2019 at the wheel of an AmDTuning.com-run FK2 Honda Civic Type R before switching to Motorbase Performance in 2020. He was fifth in last year's points with three wins.

Butcher, 33, said: "[The Toyota] was arguably the most competitive car on the grid by the end of last year – the team definitely seems to have a proper handle on it in all conditions and both with or without ballast, so I can't wait to get behind the wheel to experience it for myself."

Speedworks boss Christian Dick said: "Rory's calibre is clear to see. It's easy to forget sometimes that he only has three full seasons in the championship under his belt, because he drives with all the confidence of somebody that has been involved in the BTCC for much longer. His progress has been highly impressive – what he has accomplished since making his debut in the series is quite remarkable."

Smelt raced the GT4 Speedworks Toyota Supra in last year's British GT series and finished eighth in the drivers' standings alongside James Kell. Smelt raced in the BTCC in 2018 with the AmDTuning.com team in an Audi S3, with a best finish of 17th.

Smelt in the BTCC in 2018

# BUTTON BACK IN THE FOLD AS WILLIAMS ADVISOR

The 2009 Formula 1 world title winner Jenson Button has joined the Williams team in the role of senior advisor.

Button, who began in F1 career with the British team in 2000, said that the team, which was bought by the Dorilton Capital group last year, has a special place in his heart.

Williams chief executive Jost Capito said the 15-time grand prix winner would have an input on the business and technological side. Capito said: "Bringing Jenson back on board is another positive step to help us move forward as a team, both on and off track. Jenson has always been a friend of the team and so it is great to welcome him back into the Williams family.

"He has shown his acumen in both the business and broadcasting worlds and remains a widely respected figure in the paddock. All this experience will add another layer to our transformation both technically and as a business."

Button will dovetail his new role with his commentary duties for Sky Sports.

Button's maiden grand prix season was with Williams

Alfa will continue with Ferrari

## Alfa confirms launch amid Ferrari extension

Alfa Romeo will continue its partnership with Ferrari, ending speculation that its owner Sauber could switch to Renault.

The team formed links with the Scuderia back in 2010, and took on the name of Alfa Romeo, a sister brand to Ferrari, at the beginning of 2019.

Although the deal has not been confirmed, it is expected to be completed shortly and designers have already planned the 2021 chassis around the Ferrari power unit and gearbox. Alfa Romeo joins Haas as a customer team for Ferrari.

Kimi Raikkonen and Antonio Giovinazzi will continue on the Alfa Romeo driving strength in 2021. The team has announced that it will launch its new car in Warsaw, Poland, on February 22.

## Briscoe and Menzes to front Glickenhaus' maiden WEC attack as opener delayed

Sportscar firm Glickenhaus has confirmed that Ryan Briscoe and Gustavo Menezes will join its line-up for its maiden assault on the World Endurance Championship.

IndyCar driver Briscoe and former Rebellion Racing man Menezes will handle the team's Hypercar, the Glickenhaus-Pipo 007LMH. The American team has reportedly signed all of its 2021 drivers, but only Briscoe and Menzes have been named so far as they were both on the recently revealed FIA entry list.

In other World Endurance Championship news, the Richard Mille Racing Team has revealed an all-female line-up for its LMP2 ORECA-Gibson. The three drivers stepping up after a rookie campaign in the European Le Mans Series last term are Beitske Visser, Sophia Floersch and Tatiana Calderon.

The opening round of this year's WEC has been moved from Sebring, where it was due to take place on March 19. It has been replaced by a round at Algarve in Portugal on April 4.

Frederic Lequien, boss of the of WEC, said: "The decision was made for the beginning of the season to remain in Europe where most of our teams are based."

## Power Maxed confirms Plato's BTCC return

**Power Maxed Racing has rubber-stamped Jason Plato's return to the British Touring Car Championship this season at the wheel of the Vauxhall Astra.**

**The 97-time BTCC race winner joined the PMR team in 2019 and won the final race of the year at Brands Hatch on his way to seventh spot in the standings. He was due to contest last year's competition alongside returnee Mat Jackson, but the team decided to take a sabbatical due to the global health pandemic.**

**Plato, who won the overall title in 2001 and 2010, said: "It's the longest I've been without racing, and it's made me appreciate just how much I love it, and I have really missed my team. I'm excited about the future with Power Maxed Racing and winning the final race in '19 has lit a fire underneath me, so I'm more than ready to get back out and win my 100th race!"**

Plato will make racing return

# HIGH-PERFORMANCE PROTOTYPES TO STAR AT SPRING SILVERSTONE OPEN

## Sports Prototype Cup's promoter to hold special 'unlimited' grand prix track double-header this May

Photo: PitBox91, TF Sport, Inked Hand Images, Jakob Ebrey

New Revolution to get company

Prototypes in rare chance to hit full Silverstone track

By Graham Keilloh

**Some of the fastest prototypes seen in the UK in 2021 will race on Silverstone's full-length circuit this May in the Silverstone Open organised by the Sports Prototype Cup's promoter.**

PitBox91 is hosting a one-off double header of 'Unlimited Prototype' 30-minute races designed to attract and celebrate a diverse range of prototypes. The event is to take place on May 29, the Saturday of the late-May bank holiday weekend.

The Open is being organised in response to PitBox91 receiving interest from LMP3 and Group CN teams for racing on Silverstone's grand prix track.

With the UK not having World Endurance Championship or European Le Mans Series rounds in 2021, the event gives a rare opportunity for LMP-type, powerful, high-downforce endurance cars to perform on the Formula 1 circuit.

Sports Prototype Cup promoter James Bailey said: "Silverstone GP circuit is the perfect venue for high-downforce prototype cars. In 2018, the Open Sportscar Series ran a Silverstone GP event, attracting 41 cars representing 12 different manufacturers. Since the demise of that series, we have been lobbied by competitors to recreate that event and we are delighted to be able to provide an hour of racing with our double-header format."

The Open's races will feature the Sports Prototype Cup's regular Radical SR3 and Revolution A-One classes, plus Le Mans-style prototypes – such as the Ginetta G58, LMP3 and historic LMP cars – as well as an 'Unlimited' class for cars such as Jades, Junos, Clubmans, other Radical models and Sports 2000-type cars.

Multiple GT champion TF Sport is back in WEC GTE Am

# TF BACK IN WEC WITH NEW LINE-UPS

Last season's Le Mans winner and narrow championship runner-up TF Sport has confirmed its World Endurance Championship GTE Am class return this season with two new line-ups.

Experienced Bronze-graded GT racer Ben Keating will race a TF Aston Martin Vantage alongside 2019 GT World Challenge Endurance Silver Cup champion Felipe Fraga and 2020 Porsche Supercup runner-up Dylan Pereira.

Texas-based Keating raced a Porsche in 2019's WEC season, has competed in the last six Le Mans 24-Hour races plus has extensive IMSA experience. This weekend he races for TF in the Daytona 24 Hours.

Keating said: "It [WEC] is the only place I know of where a guy like me can compete on the same field, at the same time, in the same game with the best in the world, and still be crowned world champion, which is the ultimate goal for this season!"

TF in 2021 also joins forces with the championship rookie Japanese team D'station Racing, with a Vantage shared by Tomonobu Fujii, Satoshi Hoshino plus a TBC Silver driver.

# GINETTA CHAMPION BURNS STEPS UP TO BRITISH GT

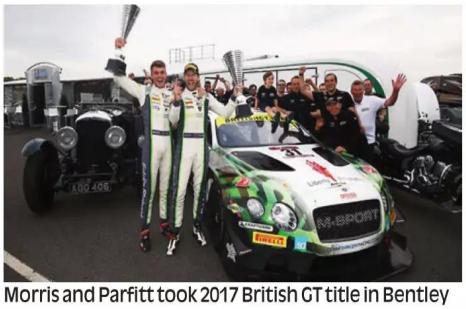
Reigning Ginetta GT4 Supercup champion Will Burns will step up to British GT in 2021 with Ginetta factory-backed Assetto Motorsport.

Burns, twice runner-up in GT4 Supercup, secured his long-awaited title last season with 15 podium finishes from 19 races. Burns will be part of an all-Silver British GT pairing with a partner to be confirmed. He raced an HHC Motorsport Ginetta G55 GT4 in the championship in 2018, scoring a podium finish.

Assetto joins British GT's GT4 contest this year, bringing back the multiple-title-winning Ginetta G55 in a new factory-backed two-car line-up. Its Pro-Am partnership Mark Sansom and Charlie Robertson was already confirmed.

Burns said: "I have been following the progress of Assetto Motorsport going up through the Ginetta ranks, and I have been impressed with what they've achieved – their vision of where they want to be is also impressive. With this strong combination it was a no brainer to jump at the chance to get involved, and I'm sure we will have a competitive package."

Ginetta GT4 champion Burns is back in British GT



Morris and Parfitt took 2017 British GT title in Bentley

# TEAM PARKER RACING ENDS SUCCESSFUL BENTLEY PARTNERSHIP

Team Parker Racing's decorated five-year spell racing with Bentley came to an end earlier this month in the team's debut Gulf 12 Hours in Bahrain.

The Parker family's Bentley link spans five generations and Team Parker linked up with Bentley in 2016 with Rick Parfitt Jr and Seb Morris competing in the British GT championship. They claimed the '17 title while last year Nick Jones and Scott Malvern took Donington Park race victory.

The team fielded Bentleys in Blancpain and delivered Europe's Bentley Motorsport Academy programme. In the recent Gulf 12 Hours Derek Pierce, Euan McKay, and Andy Meyrick finished fifth for the team after a stop-go penalty. Team Parker's 2021 plans were not confirmed as MN went to press.

Boss Stuart Parker said: "It's been a fantastic adventure over the past five years, and it continued a relationship between the Parker family and Bentley that goes right back to my grandfather, Albert. It has been an honour to represent the Bentley brand and we've had some fantastic results and some wonderful memories along the way."

# CENTURY MOTORSPORT SIGNS HENRY DAWES FOR GINETTA GT4 SUPERCUP

Multiple champion Century Motorsport has signed Fun Cup title-holder Henry Dawes for this year's Ginetta GT4 Supercup.

Dawes took the 2018 Fun Cup title and has Ginetta G55 experience, taking triple class victory in a one-off GT Cup 2020 outing, plus has driven in Britcar and Legends.

Dawes joins Andy Spencer and Blake Angliss in Century's line-up.

Dawes said: "After getting behind the wheel of the G55 at the end of last year I knew I had to race it at the top level."

Dawes "had to" race Ginetta

Season now starts at Brands

# BRITISH GT SEASON START DELAYED

**The British GT championship season start has been pushed back seven weeks due to Covid, and is now due to begin at Brands Hatch on May 22-23.**

**The initial calendar commenced with two April meetings, at Oulton Park then Snetterton, that both are now rearranged for later in 2021: Snetterton's for August 7-8 and Oulton's for September 11-12. Oulton's slot is that previously held by Donington Park's season-closer, which has been pushed back to October 16-17.**

**The revised calendar retains its total of seven meetings and each meeting's number and length of races are also unchanged.**

**The dates of the British GT-supporting BRDC British Formula 3 championship move in turn. F3's sole standalone Silverstone meeting is unchanged on August 14-15.**

**The schedule alteration follows a similar revision by the British Touring Car Championship** ***(see MN, January 21).***

**REVISED CALENDAR**

**British GT and F3**

| DATE | VENUE | FORMAT |
|---|---|---|
| May 22-23 | Brands Hatch GP | 1x2hr race |
| June 26-27 | Silverstone GP | 1x3hr |
| July 10-11 | Donington Park GP | 1x2hr |
| July 24-25 | Spa | 1x2hr |
| Aug 7-8 | Snetterton 300 | 2x1hr |
| Aug 14-15 | Silverstone GP* | N/A |
| Sept 11-12 | Oulton Park | 2x1hr |
| Oct 16-17 | Donington Park | 1x2hr |

*F3 only

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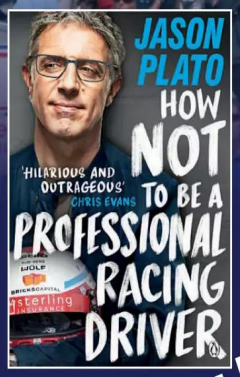


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# RACING NEWS

Photo: Rachel Bourne, Jakob Ebrey, Jack Clayden, Michael Chester

Fun Cup gets later 2021 start

Move is to avoid missing races due to travel restrictions

# BRSCC SEEKS NOVEMBER DATES FOR CANCELLED CURTAIN RAISERS

## Club aims for members to not miss out after cancelling its two campaign-opening March meetings

By Graham Keilloh

**The British Racing and Sports Car Club aims to rearrange to November its season-opening March 20 Oulton Park and March 20-21 Silverstone International meetings that were cancelled due to Covid.**

BRSCC chairman Peter Daly told Motorsport News: "Our club racing [now] doesn't start until April 10 [Cadwell Park and Snetterton meetings]. It's not our intention to change any other dates. We are looking at substituting the March dates for potentially November.

"If the government [in March] have controls in place to stop people travelling nationally that would open championships up to be a postcode lottery. By delaying our start to the season we are hoping that we can accommodate all of our competitors."

The MG Car Club's Silverstone season opener is scheduled for March 20 and Ron Gammons stated the club is "still extremely hopeful that conditions will exist where we can safely run a meeting on that weekend," adding its final decision will be made on around February 1.

The British Automobile Racing Club told MN it's preparing as normal for its March 27-28 Silverstone International curtain raiser though was monitoring the situation carefully.

BRSCC, due to a Brands Hatch clash after the British Touring Car Championship calendar's revisions, has also pushed the milestone 50th Formula Ford Festival back a week to October 30-31.

An example of award-winner Jack Clayden's work

## ALLEN TAKES INAUGURAL MN BEST EMERGING TALENT AWARD

Journalist Georgia Allen is to receive the inaugural Motorsport News award for the best emerging talent, part of Motorsport UK's latest annual young media awards.

Allen will receive the prestigious title when representing MN at an event in 2021. Allen and fellow journalist Elliot Wood also both received 'Highly Commended' status from judges and each receive a year's Guild of Motoring Writers membership.

Alex Kalinauckas and Jack Clayden took respectively the Young Journalist and Young Photographer of the Year Awards decided by panel of media professionals and past winners. Freelancer Clayden, who received a unanimous panel vote, and Autosport's grand prix editor Kalinauckas both receive a Motorsport UK trophy, a £1000 cheque and a year's Guild of Motoring Writers membership.

Motorsport UK CEO Hugh Chambers said: "Each year, the quality of entries is so impressive, and it is a privilege for Motorsport UK to award these talented young professionals. This competition has been a Motorsport UK tradition for nearly 20 years, and we hope our 2020 winners will go on to achieve great things."

## NATIONAL FORMULA FORD TO SUPPORT BRITISH GT AT OULTON

National Formula Ford 1600 will have three support races across the British GT championship's newly rearranged Oulton Park weekend on September 11-12.

National FF1600's initial 2021 calendar included a September 11 Oulton slot, a weekend added to British GT's recently revised calendar *(see story on p5)*. However National FF1600 organiser the British Racing and Sports Car Club, thanks to its "fantastic working relationships with MSV and SRO Motorsports/British GT", was able to keep its place at the meeting and with increased presence on its original two-race, single-day format.

BRSCC chief operating officer Paul McErlean said: "We will continue to do everything in our power to ensure that BRSCC members are delivered the very best race season possible. Our investment to secure a position on the British GT package at Oulton Park is yet another example of that, and one that we are delighted to have been able to deliver."

Heritage FF1600 was due to support British GT at the original April Oulton meeting. Organiser James Beckett said as MN went to press that updated dates were imminent and that Heritage's British GT support slot was retained.

FF1600 is kept on after British GT joined meeting

Trevor Carlin says Askey is perfect for British Formula 4

## ASKEY AIMS FOR BRITISH FORMULA 4 WINS WITH CARLIN IN DEBUT YEAR

Karting graduate Kai Askey has said he is looking for race victories this year after becoming the powerhouse Carlin team's first driver signing for 2021's British Formula 4 championship.

Carlin has won four drivers' and four teams' titles from the five years it has competed in British F4. Askey, 15, will make his single-seater racing debut this year having also amid the Covid-19 pandemic completed a FFSA Academy testing programme.

Askey said: "With this package around me I will be aiming for the top step. We have already made some great progress in winter testing."

Team boss Trevor Carlin added: "Kai has done a great job for us in testing so far. He's exactly the kind of driver that the British F4 series is designed for. By the time the season gets underway he will have plenty of mileage under his belt. His attitude in and out of the car is great."

## MONDELLO PARK SIX HOUR TO RUN LATER IN '21

Mondello Park has confirmed its Six Hour Endurance Fiesta Zetec race will run later in 2021 after being postponed from its initial date of last Sunday due to Covid-related restrictions.

The annual race, running from 1200hrs to 1800hrs, is for teams of three or four drivers in Zetecs from Mondello's championship. It often attracts over 100 drivers and Tommy Byrne, David Kennedy and Colin Turkington are previous entrants. Mondello called 2021's event interest unprecedented.

Promoter Leo Nulty said: "As many as four BTCC drivers [are] expected to join a host of regular racers and some well-known Irish rally names on the grid. We do not yet have an alternative date, but it will run when restrictions allow, and will more than likely be the first event [at] Mondello in 2021."

Delayed Mondello 6 Hour set to be track's first '21 event

## CARLIN FIRST ABOARD NEW SCOOTER SERIES

Carlin is the first team confirmed to join electric scooter championship eSkootr that is making its competitive debut later this year.

The category is designed to promote and develop micromobility and will use Williams Advanced Engineering machinery. Famous junior squad Carlin will confirm its three-rider line-up ahead of an early-summer pre-season test programme.

Trevor Carlin said: "We very quickly understood what opportunities [eSkootr] offered. What really appeals to us is its affordability and accessibility. It really takes a new approach in terms of racing, technology and the overlap into real-life mobility. We're already looking at candidates for the seats."

Advertising enquiries: 01233 228753

Hyundai was troubled

## HYUNDAI BOSS ADAMO TO HAVE A RETHINK AFTER MONTE DRAMAS

**Hyundai team chief Andrea Adamo has vowed to make changes after the Korean make finished the Monte Carlo Rally 22 points shy of Toyota in the manufacturers' championship WRC fight following a troubled event.**

**Ott Tanak had led after Thursday's first leg but dropped out of contention on Friday before retiring on Saturday with a double puncture. He then received a one-rally suspended ban for driving on a road section with only "three freely rotating wheels and tyres", which is a breach of the WRC regulations and the FIA international sporting code.**

**Thierry Neuville, who was linking up with new co-driver Martijn Wydaeghe for the first time, gave the team some hope in third, but Dani Sordo languished in fifth, the Spaniard admitting he hadn't been on the pace.**

**Speaking at the finish, Adamo said: "This rally has finished in the same way it has gone all weekend. Clearly, it has been totally wrong. I don't know if it is the approach of the people, or whatever, but today we have again shown our limits.**

**"It was not the case to push because we were just licking our wounds and trying to get ahead. I have to have a deep rethink on many things because what I have seen this weekend is far from something to make me proud and happy. Something in the approach has to be changed."**

# EVANS: BEST-YET MONTE RESULT WILL HELP LAUNCH MY SEASON

## Finishing as runner-up to Toyota team-mate Sebastien Ogier was a strong start for Yaris man, but Elfyn says there is more to come

Photos: Toyota Gazoo Racing, Hyundai Motorsport, mcklein-imagedatabase.com

Briton Evans says he wasn't quite at 100%

**MONTE MASTERS**

Sebastien Ogier's eighth Monte Carlo Rally win puts him ahead of Sebastien Loeb on the all-time list of winners. Here is how it stacks up:

**Monte Carlo glory**

| DRIVER | WINS |
|---|---|
| Sebastien Ogier | 8 |
| Sebastien Loeb | 7 |
| Tommi Makinen | 4 |
| Sandro Munari | 4 |
| Walter Rohrl | 4 |

By Graham Lister

**Defeat to Sebastien Ogier on Rally Monte Carlo might mean Elfyn Evans started his 2021 world title bid like he finished his push for the coveted crown last season, but the Welshman completed round one four points better off than he was 12 months ago.**

With tricky wintry weather conditions a constant menace, Evans briefly led when his Toyota team-mate fell back with a puncture. But the Frenchman was too strong for Welshman Evans and co-driver Scott Martin, courtesy of a sublime performance in the lead Yaris WRC.

Evans said: "Maybe I didn't push quite enough to really challenge Seb for the victory, he was very good this weekend," Evans said afterwards. "It's his home rally so it was always going to be tough – but credit to him. We can be happy with the points, but of course you always want more and hopefully next time I can be a bit stronger."

Explaining where he thought he was lacking, the 32-year-old added: "I don't think I quite had the feeling this weekend, never 100%. Perhaps at the start of the year it was better not to risk everything to try to win, but we know if we want to challenge for the title we'll have to do that during the year. However, I feel we've got a really strong car and a very strong team to go with it."

Welshman pleased with car

Toyota's 1-2 was the perfect start for Jari-Matti Latvala's tenure as team principal. And it could so easily have been a podium lockout had a puncture not delayed Kalle Rovanpera on the opening stage of Sunday's final leg. There were, however, four Toyotas inside the top six with Toyota junior Takamoto Katsuta finishing sixth with Briton Daniel Barritt co-driving.

"Elfyn did a really consistent run with no mistakes the whole weekend," Latvala said of Evans's effort.

# MILLENER FEELS FOR THE M-SPORT TEAM AFTER SUNINEN'S EARLY MONTE EXIT

M-Sport team chief Richard Millener says he is determined to stay positive despite Teemu Suninen's car-wrecking Monte Carlo Rally smash last week.

Suninen was challenging Ott Tanak for stage-one honours on the WRC season opener when he slid wide into a bank on a soaking wet right-hander. Hefty contact launched the Finn's Ford Fiesta into a roll before it skated backwards down a sharp drop on the other side of the road, striking a tree in the process.

With the damage too great to continue on leg two, Suninen and returning co-driver Mikko Markkula were out on the spot.

It was desperately poor reward for M-Sport after the struggles it encountered to make it to the start of the event. The cash-strapped team had to obtain special permission for its staff to enter France from the UK due to Covid-19 restrictions, while a number of additional layers of documentation had to be completed in the aftermath of the UK's exit from European Union.

"Teemu had the pace through those opening kilometres and it was great to see the excitement amongst the team as his splits came in," said Millener. "But that excitement didn't last long [and] this wasn't the start any of us wanted. But we have to stay positive and remember that we had the pace – I just feel sorry for the team. We've worked so hard for the last four weeks, we spent four days testing and that's how we're rewarded."

Suninen's stage-one crash wrecked his M-Sport machine

Marshall (left) and Kris Meeke rallied together in 2019

# MEEKE AND MARSHALL READY FOR MIDDLE EAST EXPERIENCE

Kris Meeke and co-driver Seb Marshall will start their first stage rally in almost a year when they contest the opening round of the Middle East championship in Qatar from today (January 28).

Meeke was approached about tackling the Losail-based event in an older-specification Skoda Fabia R5 during the recent Dakar Rally and, after accepting the offer, called upon Marshall to co-drive.

Speaking to Motorsport News from Doha, where he was required to serve seven days quarantine after flying in from the UK on January 19, Marshall said: "It's a completely new rally and a new experience for me competing in the Middle East so there's a little bit of unknown. But in terms of the mechanics of co-driving I'm not too apprehensive. I guess doing quarantine for seven days shows how keen I am to do a rally."

Meeke and Marshall last worked together during a day-long test in a Fabia Rally2 in Italy last August, which served as a joint-development session for Michelin and the Czech manufacturer.

"It was on Tarmac so extremely different circumstances to what we'll encounter in Qatar," Marshall explained. "But our overriding impression at the time was this is a very impressive car that Skoda has produced."

Of the chances of further outings with Meeke, Marshall said: "There's obviously been a huge amount of hoops to jump through [to do Qatar]. Clearly competing is what we want to be doing and we're grateful for the opportunities that we get. But it's folly to have targets to do certain events or a certain number of events."

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# RALLY NEWS

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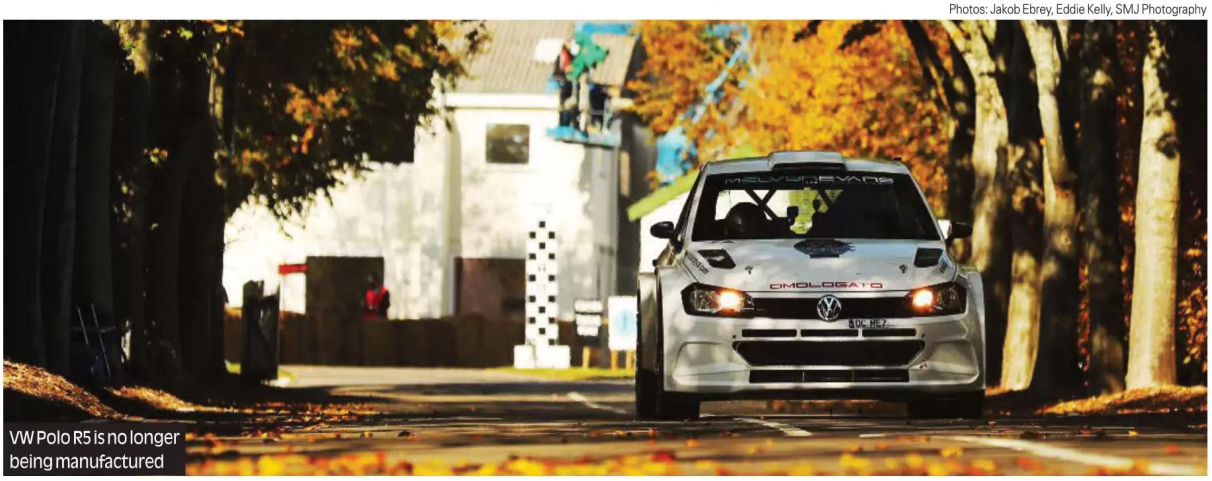
VW Polo R5 is no longer being manufactured

## MNCRC GETS CADWELL PARK DOUBLE HEADER

**A Motorsport News Circuit Rally Championship double-header will be held for the first time in the contest's history at Cadwell Park in April.**

**The Alan Healy Memorial Stages – rescheduled from January – will run on Saturday April 3 before the Cirrus Research Stages, which was meant to run in November, on Sunday April 4.**

**Darren Spann, series co-ordinator, said: "I am delighted to confirm that MNCRC, Cadwell Park and MSV have reached an agreement in principle to host two rounds of the MNCRC. However, these rounds will be subject to Motorsport UK approval, as our priority is the safety of all involved and strict compliance with Covid-19 regulations.**

**"I would like to thank all our sponsors, competitors and fans who have been so supportive throughout this and to assure them we are determined to do all we can to get the MNCRC to an eight-round championship this season."**

**Championship organisers are still discussing new dates for the Brands Hatch Stages and Neil Howard Stages at Oulton Park.**

Two in one: Cadwell Park

# VW POLO R5 "SHOULD REMAIN COMPETITIVE" DESPITE ITS LACK OF DEVELOPMENT

## Leading figures are confident car will remain a competitive force post VW Motorsport

By Luke Barry

**Meirion Evans has told MN he has no doubt Volkswagen's Polo GTI R5 will remain competitive despite last month's news that VW Motorsport was disbanding.**

Evans' father Melvyn's business Melvyn Evans Motorsport owns a brace of Polos available for hire with one used by Meirion in the Irish Tarmac Championship. Evans Jr says he isn't worried "about the car becoming uncompetitive" despite it no longer being developed by a manufacturer.

"I think the cars will be good enough to compete through the duration of this R5 period let's just say that," he told MN. "It's hard to find the right phrasing but it's hard to imagine the car suddenly becoming uncompetitive over time. In two years' time I don't foresee being any slower than any of the others.

"I still am not sure if more people will want to try them or people want to get out of them. I think initially when the news came out we thought shit we'll probably have to sell them but it doesn't seem that way now. I think people are still aware it's probably the best car out there so that's not going to change because they're stopping making them, just hopefully they can find somebody good to take over the parts."

The VW Polo had quickly become the car of choice in Ireland specifically before coronavirus brought national rallying to a halt, with Evans, Donagh Kelly and Alastair Fisher all using one on the Galway International Rally last year.

Osian Pryce was supposed to give the car its British Rally Championship debut on the West Cork Rally before it was curtailed. Pryce did eventually drive the car at the Goodwood Speedweek, but he revealed to MN that he "had heard rumours" VW wouldn't be developing the cars before he struck the West Cork deal.

"I wanted to try it just to see what it was like and to say I'd tried it, and I'd heard rumours that potentially they would stop and that's the reason there was no more development after they'd built the cars," said Pryce.

"It's still a very quick car, it's still winning rallies as it is so it's not bad at all but I haven't really focused on [one car]," he added. "I've asked a few different companies for pricing and they're all different cars. I haven't really tied myself to one car it's whatever deal works if it happens."

Evans doesn't foresee the Polo becoming unpopular

Argyll becomes a closed-road event this year after three years of forest stages

# ARGYLL RALLY ORGANISERS HOPEFULLY OF GOING AHEAD

Organisers of the Argyll Rally are hopeful that the June 25-26 event, which will be a closed-road rally for the first time in 2021, will go ahead as planned.

After a 14-year hiatus, the Argyll Rally returned to the Scottish Rally Championship calendar as a gravel round but is now a two-day Tarmac rally. Chief organisers Mull Car Club will be supported by Manx Autosport which has decades of experienced organising closed-road rallies on the Isle of Man.

A total of 13 stages and 70 competitive miles are on offer, beginning with five stages – including two in the host town of Dunoon – on Friday evening before four stages that will each be repeated once on Saturday.

"I'm reasonably optimistic that there's a chance we can run," clerk of the course Chris Woodcock told MN. "In exactly the same vein as Mull did last year, we're continuing up until the point where we realise that there's absolutely no chance we can run. And if it doesn't run in June, we'll then look at what suitable dates we've got to move it to and if that means we're moving to next year, such is life."

Argyll is provisionally the opening round of the 2021 SRC following the cancellation of the first three rounds. In a statement issued last week, SRC bosses said they still hope to kick off the season in Argyll.

# FISHER HAS INTEREST IN A BRC 2021 SEASON

Alastair Fisher has revealed he was considering an entry into the British Rally Championship this year, but recent event cancellations might spoil that plan.

Fisher last appeared in the BRC eight years ago in a Citroen DS3 R3, but told MN back in October that he's always had an eye on the BRC.

Speaking last week before the Circuit of Ireland and Clacton events were cancelled, Fisher told MN: "I sort of felt that there was probably more chance of the BRC getting up and going than the [Irish] Tarmac but that's only a personal view based on how things were going with the lockdowns and so on but I suppose at this point in time anything could happen.

"I think the BRC calendar was interesting, more of a compact approach for the times we're in. But we'll see if anything comes off. I'm guessing things won't be looking that hot until at least the middle of the year at present."

MN understands the closing date for Irish rally calendar applications was last Thursday (January 21) and championship permit applications will follow once that is finalised.

Fisher has competed on Irish Tarmac since 2016 in an R5

# BRITISH RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP CALENDAR SLIMMED DOWN AMID CANCELLATIONS

## The loss of two events has trimmed the BRC to just five rounds and one asphalt

Photos: Jakob Ebrey, World RX, 5 Nations British Rallycross Championship, Andros Trophy

By Luke Barry

**The opening Tarmac leg of the 2021 British Rally Championship has been scrapped due to coronavirus, with both the Circuit of Ireland and Tendring & Clacton Rallies being forced to cancel.**

The loss of the first two rounds of the series follows the cancellation of the third round, the Jim Clark Rally, two weeks ago. The Circuit of Ireland's abandonment was confirmed last Wednesday.

Irish event director Graeme Stewart said: "On one level this was a very difficult decision to make as we had just secured the first round of the British Rally Championship. On another level it was a no-brainer. Safety must always come first and we couldn't justify putting additional pressure on the hard-working overstretched NHS staff and other public health services to run the event."

The cancellation of the Tendring & Clacton Rally – scheduled on April 24-25 three weeks after the Circuit – was firmed up after an organisers meeting last Wednesday too but not communicated until Sunday. Event director Tony Clements told MN last Friday: "We had a senior organisers' meeting and took the decision that there's just too much uncertainty, there's just no prospect of us being able to do the work we need to before the event to make it happen. Not only are we not going to be out of lockdown, Essex isn't going to be out of tier three or four any time soon so we have taken the decision that many others have and will that it's not going to happen."

July's Nicky Grist Stages could now kick off the year

This fresh batch of cancellations means the Nicky Grist Stages on July 10 stands as the provisional opening round of the BRC. The championship's reserve event, Mull Rally, on October 8-9, has now been inducted into the official schedule alongside the Grampian Trackrod and Cambrian Rallies.

Elsewhere, the Manx National Rally, which was scheduled for May 14-15, has also been cancelled, meaning two of the first three 2021 Asphalt Championship rounds are called off. The theoretical season-opener is the Tour of Epynt on April 3.

Circuit of Ireland was to kick off the 2021 BRC

Euro RX could go solo

## EURO RALLYCROSS COULD BE POISED FOR SPLIT FROM WORLD RX ROSTER

The FIA has confirmed that the European Rallycross Championship could be split from the World Rallycross Championship roster from 2022, as an invitation to tender for the role of promotor for the European Championship from 2022 to 2025 has been issued.

Following World RX commercial rights holder IMG's withdrawal from its position in the series last year, the FIA released an invitation to tender for the rights to World RX. Motorsport News understands a decision is imminent on who will head up World RX moving forward. A statement from the sport's governing body reads: "A first Request for Proposal (RFP) was launched in October 2020 with a view to selecting a promoter for the FIA World Rallycross Championship from 2021, including the new RX2e Rallycross Championship and, for the year 2021, the European RX1 and RX3 Championships. A second RFP will be opened with a view to identifying the future promoter of the European Rallycross Championships for at least the years 2022 to 2025."

Entertainment giant IMG became the European Rallycross Championship's first commercial rights holder in 2013, and has presided over World RX since its inception in 2014.

Since then, the European series, led by its Supercar category, has also been run by the World RX promoter as part of the series' support package.

Should Euro RX be promoted by a different body to World RX, that would leave just the World RX Supercar (RX1) class, which is set to use electric cars in 2022, and the RX2e support category on the World RX bill, while Euro RX comprises of its Supercar (European RX1) and Super1600 (Now RX3) categories.

## HORTON RETURNS TO BRITISH RALLYCROSS IN AN IMPREZA

Subaru Impreza Supercar racer Simon Horton will return to the British Rallycross Championship this season after a year away.

The Clitheroe driver is yet to confirm if he will take part in a full 5 Nations BRX campaign, but has committed to at least contesting selected events with his self-built machine. Horton was unable to race in 2020 due to work commitments and coronavirus restrictions. He finished fifth in the 2019 season.

"The plan is get in as many rounds as possible," said Horton. "In particular, Mondello, Knockhill and Spa all look like great events to do, but whether I'm able to confirm the whole championship, I'm not yet in a position to say.

"But I do 100% plan to race when I possibly can, I've been sat on the sidelines for far too long."

A seven-round calendar has been laid out for the 5 Nations BRX this year, with 2020 Supercar newcomer, Tristan Ovenden, also committed to continuing his learning in the top class with his ex-LD Motorsports Citroen DS3.

Horton didn't compete in 2020 but is back in his Subaru

First victory for L'hoste

## DUBOURG IN PRIME POSITION AHEAD OF ANDROS TROPHY FINALE

Former RX Academy racer Clementine Lhoste claimed a maiden victory in the Andros Trophy's second-tier Elite category last Friday at Lans En Vercors and then followed up with a repeat win on Saturday.

In the headline Elite Pro category four-time champion and points leader Jean-Baptiste Dubourg claimed victory in the first instalment of the double-header weekend ahead of DA Racing Renault ZOE team-mate Nicolas Prost, but could only manage seventh place on Saturday, while Prost was again second.

Pussier driver Nathanael Berthon was the victor on Saturday, but a pair of third-place finishes for Yvan Muller Racing driver Yann Ehrlacher ensured he stayed in touch with points' leader Dubourg.

Rallycrosss and ice racing expert Dubourg has a 25-point advantage ahead of the final two rounds at Val Thorens this weekend, the venue of traditional season-opener having been moved to the last race spot due to coronavirus restrictions in France in December.

Advertising enquiries: 01233 228753

# HISTORICS

## DOWN THE PUB

### JOHN EVANS

**Racing for 50 years**
**Lives:** Albrighton, Shropshire

Evans: raced the top stars

**He always wanted to race**

"I'd always wanted to go into motor racing. I wanted to race from when I was six and watching it on the TV with my father. As a youngster I worked for Midland Racing Partnership with Mick Mobberley who went on to form Hi-Tech Motorsport. I thought the way I could get into racing was by selling my road car to fund a racing car. But to do that I needed a company car so I got a job as a salesman for the local Ford garage."

**He started in FF1600**

"I started off with a Formula Ford Alexis Mk15 in 1969. I entered the same championship as Emerson Fittipaldi and Carlos Pace. That was quite overwhelming. I did that for a season and decided I needed to move away from it as I hadn't got the knowledge that the teams had got on car set-up. I was doing it all myself."

**There was success in Modsports**

"So I bought a Ginetta G4 for the STP Modified Sportscar Championship and I won the up to 1150cc class in the championship. Then Derek Matthews at ARK Racing built me a Lotus Elan and I ran that for three seasons and won a championship."

**Porsches followed**

"I wanted to move on to Formula Atlantic, which I'd always wanted to do. I sold the Elan very quickly but I couldn't raise the shortfall. About 18 months later, I bought a Porsche and entered the BFGoodrich Championship. Then I gave motor racing a rest for a while, maybe eight or nine years, and I came back by buying a 2.4 Porsche 911 and did three Tour Britannias."

**He raced with the HGPCA**

"I bought the ex-John Surtees Cooper T56 and raced with the HGPCA. Then at the same time, I bought John Harper's Brabham BT4 with a 2.7-litre engine which I ran for several years with Hi-Tech Motorsport."

**Now it is Historic F2**

"I then wanted a Historic Formula Ford, so I bought the Titan Mk6. I also wanted to move into Formula 2 and I only wanted to do it if I could get a March 782. That was the car I'd got to have and I was lucky enough to find one. The F2 car has had lots of love thrown at it and will be ready for the new season."

Photos: Paul Lawrence

Smith will drive Formula Atlantic Ralt

Smith lifted the honours at the Formula Ford Festival

# SMITH TARGETS SUCCESS IN GEOFF LEES TROPHY THIS SEASON

## Festival winner to race newly acquired Formula Atlantic Ralt in 2021

By Paul Lawrence

**Formula Ford star Rory Smith will move up the single-seater ranks this season to race a Ralt RT4 Formula Atlantic in the new Geoff Lees Trophy for 1980s single-seaters.**

Smith and his father Ray have acquired the RT4 from New Zealand and will race it in the Historic Sports Car Club's series alongside his Formula Ford programme that will probably include the major end-of-season events. In October, the 21-year-old from Hampton in west London won the Formula Ford Festival in a Medina JL18.

"It's a step up to slicks and wings and a lot more power," said Ray Smith. "This seems a more cost-effective option in a powerful car to gain experience and build his reputation. It has 220bhp and weighs 470kg, so it is very similar to more modern cars. We're certainly not shutting the door on modern racing: this is to complement it."

More than 100 RT4s were built by Ron Tauranac's company through the early 1980s, primarily for Formula Atlantic and there has been no obvious place to race them in the UK until now.

Smith's RT4 is currently in transit from New Zealand and is due to arrive in the UK in early March. It was originally raced in America in 1985 by Charlie Batka and was also raced by Jeff Krosnoff in 1987. It was later sold to Australia and New Zealand and was latterly raced by Tony Quinn.

The Geoff Lees Trophy is open to all up-to-two-litre 1980s single-seaters and will start its 2021 season on the Silverstone Grand Prix circuit on May 22-23.

GT cars will be attracted to bolster the Thundersports line-up

## HSCC aims to swell Thundersports grid with GT cars

The Historic Sports Car Club is working to attract more GT cars to its Thundersports series, which goes into its third season with a calendar topped by a return to the Silverstone Classic.

Sports prototypes from up to 1981 remain at the core of the five-event series, along with Can-Am cars of the period and all Pinto-powered Sports 2000s.

Now, an invitation is open for American cars from the Trans-Am and IMSA GT classes of the period to join the grid along with Group 4 and Group 5 GT cars.

Andy Dee-Crowne of the HSCC said: "We're also keen to welcome UK teams and drivers who usually race in Europe. With the twin challenges of international travel during the ongoing pandemic and the issue of carnets for taking race cars out of the UK, we can offer races at leading UK events."

## MCC trial ready to celebrate anniversary

One of the UK's biggest motorsport events of 2021 will be the Motor Cycling Club's 120th Anniversary Trial on Saturday June 26 with a maximum of 420 entries on two, three and four wheels.

To celebrate 120 years since the MCC was formed in 1901, the classic trial will start at Chard in Somerset at midnight and finish in Cornwall from late morning onwards.

The 180-mile route will include 15 of challenging trials sections in the south-west and finish with the Blue Hills sections near St Agnes.

The organisers have capped entries at 420 with priority and discounted entry being given to MCC members who entered the cancelled 2021 Exeter Trial.

The change of date for the Plains Rally, which will move from May 22 to a projected date in August, means a later start for the British Historic Rally Championship. The opening event will now be the Red Kite Stages (above) on June 13 although, like all events, this rally remains subject to Covid restrictions and Motorsport UK confirmation.

## Lombard Rally Festival not under Motorsport UK wing

Local motor clubs have moved to distance themselves from the recently announced Lombard Rally Festival Newcastle, due to run near Seahouses on Saturday July 3.

The crux of the issue is that the demonstration event does not run under the wing of Motorsport UK, even though other events of this nature have done so.

In a statement Colin Salkeld, chairman of the Association of North East and Cumbria Car Clubs said: "Our concern is that as it's not being run under Motorsport UK regulations this poses a threat to established events should anything unfortunate happen. Events that are organised by Motorsport UK clubs are respected for their safety, good organisation, and staffing by professional volunteers, including good PR work."

## IN BRIEF

**Gerry Corbett**

Everyone at MN was saddened to learn of the death of leading period Formula Ford engineer Gerry Corbett. He was first known for his role as chief instructor at the Silverstone Racing School before becoming team manager for the British Racing Prospects Formula Ford team. In the 1970s and 1980s he was central to the success of drivers like Jim Walsh and Andy Wallace.

**Carlo Franchi**

MN was sad to learn of the death of Carlo Franchi, who raced under pseudonym of 1960s and 1970s racer Gimax at the age of 83. The Italian started in Formula Junior and progressed through F3 into two-litre sportscars but is best known in the UK for competing in Aurora British F1 in 1979 and '80 when he raced a Williams FW06 for Dave Price Racing.

**Awards online**

The 2020 Royal Automobile Club Historic Awards will be unveiled live in an online broadcast this evening (Thursday, January 28). The virtual presentation will start at 1830hrs and run for around 45 minutes as all the major award winners are announced. A link to the presentation will be available at royalautomobileclub historicawards.co.uk

**Deja Vu pressing on**

The organisers of the Deja Vu Ireland West retro event have pledged that it will run in 2021 but have added a reserve date of September 17-18 should it not be possible on the planned date of May 21-22. Promoter Plum Tyndall said: "With four months to go there are doubts that the vaccines will have been sufficiently distributed to warrant the safe running of our highly social event."

**Chevrons en masse**

Three examples of the Chevron B6 and B8 will compete in the Dan Gurney sportscar race at the Goodwood Members' Meeting on May 15-16. It is believed to be the first time that late 1960s examples of Derek Bennett's classic design have been invited to race at Goodwood and among them will be the B8 shared by Hugh Colman and his sons Mark and Charlie.

**HERO entries busy**

Entries for two Historic Endurance Rallying Organisation classic rallies planned for March are filling up quickly. Subject to government and Motorsport UK restrictions, the Per Ardua Ad Infinitum will run on March 5-6 from Taunton in Somerset while HERO Challenge One will run in Derbyshire on Saturday March 20. Around 20 places are left for each event.

# WRC REPORT: MONTE CARLO

Photos: mcklein-imagedatabase.com, M-Sport, Red Bull Content Pool

Ogier was in a class of one last week

# OGIER KICKS OFF 2021 WITH RECORD-BREAKING MONTE WIN

## The reigning World Rally champion makes the brightest start, but team-mate Elfyn Evans kept him honest. By Luke Barry

**Making history is nothing new for Sebastien Ogier, but there was something that little bit extra special about the seven-time world champion's victory on last week's Rally Monte Carlo. Indeed, the Frenchman even admitted he almost had tears in his eyes.**

Scoring an eighth Monte win put him to the top of the event's winner list. It is an event Ogier cherishes success on more than any other as he hails from the host city of Gap – and ticked him over to 50 victories in the WRC. And he did it in style, winning eight of the event's 14 stages – including the powerstage – to carve open an early nine-point lead in the championship.

"The car has been amazing I really enjoyed the weekend, it's been such a pleasure," Ogier said. "I almost have tears in my eyes now, it was a good decision to do one more year. The team is great, such a huge thanks I want to give to all of you. Jari [Matti Latvala], welcome boss with a win – good one!"

Britain's Elfyn Evans secured second place, making it a dream start for Latvala as his tenure as Toyota team principal began with a 1-2 finish. Thierry Neuville – paired with Martijn Wydaeghe for the first time after he and Nicolas Gilsoul parted ways just days before the rally – was over a minute adrift in third.

Four Toyotas inside the top six would suggest Rally Monte Carlo was a white-and-red wash, but it was in fact Hyundai's Ott Tanak who led the rally out the blocks with a pair of fastest stage times on Thursday afternoon. He was closely chased by Yaris driver Kalle Rovanpera though, who was just 3.3 seconds adrift after the opening day.

That was as long as Hyundai boss Andrea Adamo's smile would last though, as Tanak slipped back on Friday to end the day 25.3s adrift and then he retired on Saturday after a calamitous pair of stages. Failing to notice a small rock on the recce cost Tanak a tyre before a slow puncture on the following stage – the same one he had his terrifying accident on 12 months ago – led to his retirement. With only one spare, Tanak did make it back to service but had to retire as per the regulations which mandate all cars must arrive back in a roadworthy condition.

Hyundai's hopes rested on Neuville and Sordo. Neuville wasn't at his best as he built up his relationship with his new co-driver, but did snatch third spot from Rovanpera on Sunday morning when the Finn punctured. It was a promising display from Rovanpera but not without error – with a 10s time penalty for arriving a minute late to the SS4 time control and a slide off the road into a field on Saturday the key mistakes. Sordo was a forgettable fifth on his final rally with Carlos del Barrio who will now make way for Borja Rozada.

This was all just background noise to the leaders though. Ogier had started Friday's leg down in fifth because of a brake pedal issue but he soon laid out his stall, blasting into the lead after SS4. His hard work was undone with a sixth-stage puncture that cost him 34.7s to Evans who won the test and moved into the lead. But a resounding 16s thumping from Ogier humbled Evans, who would soon lose his lead on Saturday morning.

At the end, Evans was aware he wasn't a match for his in-form team-mate but no doubt had memories of his rally and championship-ending accident on Rally Monza just six weeks earlier.

"Seb was better this weekend," Evans openly admitted. "Of course our target is to fight with him. I would've preferred to be a little bit more competitive against him, I can see the time but it just didn't fit quite in my comfort zone this weekend."

A year ago however, Evans finished in third place on the same event so second represented a good step forward. Ogier might have won this battle, but there's still a very long war to be had…

**RESULTS**

**Monte Rally , January 21-24, 2021**

| POS | DRIVER/CO-DRIVER | CAR | TIME |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Sebastien Ogier/Julien Ingrassia | Toyota Yaris WRC | 2h56m33.7s |
| 2 | Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin | Toyota Yaris WRC | +32.6s |
| 3 | Thierry Neuville/Martijn Wydaeghe | Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC | +1m13.5s |
| 4 | Kalle Rovanpera/Jonne Halttunen | Toyota Yaris WRC | +2m33.6s |
| 5 | Dani Sordo/Carlos del Barrio | Hyundai i20 Coupe WRC | +3m14.2s |
| 6 | Takamoto Katsuta/Daniel Barritt | Toyota Yaris WRC | +7m01.3s |
| 7 | Andreas Mikkelsen/Ola Floene | Skoda Fabia Rally2 evo | +7m23.6s |
| 8 | Gus Greensmith/Elliott Edmondson | Ford Fiesta WRC | +8m21.1s |
| 9 | Adrien Fourmaux/Renaud Jamoul | Ford Fiesta Rally2 | +9m15.8s |
| 10 | Eric Camilli/Francois-Xavier Buresi | Citroen C3 Rally2 | +10m41.0s |

**Championship:** 1 Ogier 30; 2 Evans 21; 3 Neuville 17; 4 Rovanpera 16; 5 Sordo 11; 6 Katsuta 8; 7 Mikkelsen 6; 8 Greensmith 4; 9 Fourmaux 2; 10 Camilli 1

Record-breakers: Ingrassia (l) and Ogier have now won eight Montes

## GREENSMITH: MONTE THE WORST DRIVE OF MY CAREER

Manchester driver Gus Greensmith described his run to eighth overall on Rally Monte Carlo as the worst performance of his career so far.

Greensmith's M-Sport Ford was the only one in the rally after team-mate Teemu Suninen binned it on SS1 *(see rally news, p8)* but the Brit failed to make an impression on the leaderboard. While he didn't have any significant moments or problems, Greensmith was simply bereft of confidence and finished the rally over eight minutes down on the leader and behind Andreas Mikkelsen's Rally2-spec Skoda.

"I'd say it's been the worst performance of my career so far," said Greensmith. "It was really hard for all the guys back at M-Sport to even just get the cars here in this current situation. I feel with the preparation I had I should've delivered a much better performance but it's happened now. I'm going to learn from it and improve to get back to where I can be because this isn't good enough."

Team principal Rich Millener added: "Gus had a really good test and was looking forward to the rally, but for some reason it just didn't click for him. He's extremely self-critical and I know he'll have taken the disappointment to heart. And let's not forget how difficult this rally is.

"Confidence is everything, and if you're missing that it's going to show but he made it through, he's got the mileage and we'll work with him to unlock that confidence on the next rallies."

Greensmith will be glad to see the back of the 2021 Monte

## MIKKELSEN UNSTOPPABLE IN WRC2 SUPPORT CLASS

As pre-season statements go, Andreas Mikkelsen's admission that he planned to dominate every rally he started was as bullish as it gets. But on the Monte he was true to his word, beating M-Sport's Adrien Fourmaux to the opening WRC 2 win of the year by 1m52.2s.

Mikkelsen led the event from start to finish, but he wasn't completely unchallenged. Fourmaux was within 50s of the Toksport Skoda driver at the halfway stage but a puncture on Saturday morning pegged him back and into the clutches of Eric Camilli. From there Fourmaux wouldn't falter, keeping the former M-Sport driver at arm's length before Camilli arrived at the start of the penultimate stage four minutes late to ease the pressure on Fourmaux.

Despite not registering for points on round one, Oliver Solberg and Nikolay Gryazin also made their presence known. Solberg – on his WRC debut in a Hyundai R5 – was fifth quickest on SS11 and then fourth fastest overall on SS12 with Gryazin's VW Polo just behind him in fifth, but Solberg's rally would end on a sour note as he ditched his i20 on the powerstage.

Frenchman Yohan Rossel won the WRC 3 class in a Citroen C3 Rally2. Britain's Tom Williams was 10th on his Monte debut in his Ford Fiesta Rally2.

Mikkelsen led WRC 2 from start to finish in his Skoda Fabia

Advertising enquiries: 01233 228753

FEATURE

# O'NEILL: I WAS NEVER CUT OUT TO BE A RACER

## Racer-turned-ITV4 pundit speaks to Matt James about making a life in motorsport

Expert insight: O'Neill now offers his views on ITV4

**It is one of the most enduring – and endearing – images of the British Touring Car Championship. Paul O'Neill clambered from his Vauxhall Astra in 2002, sank to his knees and kissed the Oulton Park Tarmac.**

The local boy had just won his first BTCC race only three-and-a-bit years after stepping into the cockpit for the first time. But the outpouring of emotion, which extended to tears on the podium too, was more significant than just a maiden triumph at the top level.

For O'Neill, it was the realisation that he *did* belong and he *could* perform among the best. It was a turning point in his life in helping him to work out what he was and what he wanted to become. Ultimately, it had shown the world he wasn't just a Spice Boy.

O'Neill's half-sister Mel C and the Spice Girls had spiced up the world in the late 1990s and that enabled the siblings to look after each other. Mel's financial support helped open doors for O'Neill in the motorsport world. She'd opened the doors, but O'Neill wanted to walk through them and announce himself as his own man. Winning at Oulton Park was a major step towards that.

The proud Liverpool FC fan went on to be a fixture on the BTCC grid through to the end of 2011, and has been back for sporadic appearances since.

However, his decision to swap the gearstick for the ITV4 microphone has given his career a whole new direction and allowed him to following in the footsteps of his true motorsport hero, as you will discover here.

***Question: Where did your passion for motorsport come from? Did you always want to be a racing driver? Did you go karting? Was it in your family?***
**Mari Christofoletti**
**Via Twitter**

**Paul O'Neill:** "No-one in my family knew anything at all about motorsport: they do now, though! No-one introduced me to it at all. I had loved cars anyway as a kid, but then I had a car crash with my dad when I was young and from that point, I was just obsessed with cars."

**MN:** Having a road crash got you interested cars? Surely it should have put you off!

**PON:** "It's true: to put yourself through the motorsport ringer, you either have to be a very special character or be damn stupid! It is bizarre, though. I went into the windscreen in that crash and bounced back into the passenger seat, and I still have a huge scar from it on my forehead. After that point, I started to watch racing."

**MN:** This explains a lot: it was a bang on the head that got you into motorsport…

**PON:** "I guess you could say that! And the person who got me excited about motorsport was not even a driver, it was Murray Walker. His passion for telling the story of what we were watching on screen really fired up the emotions and it clicked with me. I was glued to the TV watching Nigel Mansell and the rest is history from there."

**MN:** I guess actually being a racing driver seemed a million miles away at that time and you were just a fan?

**PON:** "I just watched motorsport and enjoyed it. It never once ever crossed my mind to participate.

"I never asked my mum and dad. The only thing my mum and dad ever did motorsport-wise was to give me a fiver to go to the local Warrington Speedkarting place. Me and a mate from school, if we had been good enough during the week and our parents had bunged us a few quid to top up the paper round money, we would go down there and blow it all on the six laps or so we got at the karting centre. That's as close as I got until I was 19…"

**MN:** So without Mel's help, you would never have set foot in a racing car?

**PON:** "If it wasn't for my sister, I wouldn't be doing this interview in Motorsport News. I had a really bad time when the Spice Girls came out in 1995. I was finishing my GCSEs and I didn't know where I was mentally. I didn't know what I wanted to do. I had always had a desire to join the traffic police. So from the age of 13, when I had spoken to careers advisors, I went down the route that would lead me there. I had extra lessons, particularly in maths, just trying to do all I could to get to the police. I went into A Levels to try and get a degree and then get

Photos: Jakob Ebrey

Learning his lines: Paul O'Neill in an MGF in '00

One for the album: Paul and Mel C...

Baptism of fire in practice for O'Neill's first British Touring Car contest

accelerated promotion in the police, and then it all went wrong in the late 1990s.

"All people cared about – and even the teachers were arseholes – was the Spice Girls. People were just taking the piss out of me and I couldn't deal with it mentally. I am not a very strong character when it comes to batting away people taking the piss.

"I was between a rock and a hard place. My mum was worried about me and so my sister took me away on the Spice Girls world tour in 1997. It is funny how these things happen: I met the head cook of the tour, and my sister told me that the cook's brother raced in the FIA GT Championship. We got in touch, he invited me to Donington Park in September. I had never been to a track before. The guy told me I needed to go to the Jim Russell Racing Drivers' School at Donington, and he put me in touch with the right people. My sister said 'tell me what I need to do and how much it is going to cost?' and we made it happen. It went from there."

***Question: When you decided to go racing, you jumped straight into the MGF Cup: that was a very high level of championship for your debut. Why did you choose that?***

**John Charles**
**Via email**

**PON:** "But I didn't know club motorsport even existed. I simply didn't know what it was. Throughout my career, I have never done my own thing, unless it comes to my media work. I have always had my hand held: firstly by Peter Hignett at ABG Motorsport and then Marvin and Sandra Humphries [bosses of Tech-Speed Motorsport]. Once I had done the course and got my race licence, I was at a loss. I didn't know anyone in motorsport, and no-one I knew had any contacts in motorsport. Eventually, and friend of a friend put me in touch with a guy who looked after a bit of talent around Liverpool and he did a bit of club racing himself. He had heard I was interested in getting involved, and he met me in McDonald's in Widnes, and he took me to ABG Motorsport. Then they forged links with Bintcliffe Motorsport and they invited me to Croft in 1998 to go and watch a round. I met a bunch of people and talked to them all: they told me it would be hard, but the MGF Cup is what I should do.

"I had a test in the car at Snetterton in 1998 but then just sat on my hands a bit and waited for the 1999 season to start. I had no testing or anything. I remember finishing qualifying after the first round at Silverstone Grand Prix circuit in 1999 and I had to get guided back to the paddock by marshals because I had got lost! That is how it all started…"

**MN:** You must have been proud of what you did in MGFs, because you were a newcomer and that was a tough series to shine in…

**PON:** "I know that was my hardest year [in] racing, because those cars are the most difficult cars I have raced in my 21 years behind the wheel. But, back then, I didn't know what I was doing. There was no frame of reference for me. But when you are a newcomer and you are a chequebook walking around the paddock, people keep thinking they know what's best for you. I have never been frightened of jumping in the deep end, and I never will be, and looking back, it made me who I am today. I needed to prove a point. It would have been easier for me to go and jump in something else, look good early doors and the Mel C tag would probably have disappeared. Because I was shocking and shite for the first year of MGs, I was in the Daily Mail or the Daily Mirror every time I was underneath a tyre wall at any track. OK! magazine was also sponsoring me that first year: my sister didn't pay a penny. Everything that happened in that 1999 season made me who I am.

"People don't understand, and they take the mickey when they saw me getting all emotional after winning my first touring car race in 2002, but they don't know what I went through. Once you get there, you realise the emotion involved. Doing the MGFs was the right choice but, at the time, when I was going down the Craner Curves backwards and ending in the gravel crying for my mum and thinking I don't want to do it anymore and I was 19, I had to have a word with myself."

**MN:** How did the relationship between you and [long-time supporter] Marvin Humphries at Tech-Speed come about? That was from MGF days, wasn't it?

**PON:** "There had been a split in the MGF team, and I didn't like what was going on. My sister had given me the money to pay for what needed to be paid for on top of the OK! sponsorship, and I am tight-fisted. There were lots of bad vibes going around, and Marvin came and approached me in the paddock after I had an accident at Castle Combe in qualifying. He asked if I would be racing and I told him I would not, because the team said the car was knackered. Marvin was taken aback and said his boys would have fixed it. He told me to be careful. The problem was that the [MG] team wanted me to go and do the National Saloon Car Championship at the time because they would earn more money from [me]. I got an upgrade on my licence and went and did a one-off round against the likes of [former Peugeot works BTCC driver] Simon Harrison, and I qualified fourth…I was ahead of people like James Kaye. But I didn't know what I had done because I didn't know who these other drivers were. But it also taught me that front-wheel drive was a bit easier than an MGF Cup car…

"Marvin saw something in me that day in the National Saloons and he gave me a business card, and our relationship started there really. We had a meeting over the winter, but I was still doing it all on my

*continued on page 16*

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# FEATURE

Keeping control: Here comes the win

Unplanned: one of the greatest BTCC moments

Dream team: O'Neill was at the forefront of the works Vauxhall attack

own. I had no idea of the circles I was moving in and I had no support. I am not a spiritual person, but I think meeting Marvin was meant to be."

***Question: Did you pinch yourself getting into the British Touring Car championship so quickly, and was there always a stigma about the fact that Mel C had paid for your racing?***
**James Hilton**
**Via email**
**PON:** "[Two-time BTCC champion and Vauxhall team-mate] James Thompson put it in the best way possible to me a few years later. He was the only one that really understood the struggles and the battle with mental health I had been through. I was depressed because I didn't know when it was going to end. I felt like I was just along for the ride. Thommo always said to me that it was the cross I had to bear and I could only just go and enjoy the moment I was in. That was the best advice anyone could have given.

"The problem was that when I got into touring cars, I had Northern Star [Mel C's album] all over the car. If I didn't perform, I looked like an idiot. As much as it was a mental hinderance – or it seemed to be in terms of the outside world – it was also a massive gain. In terms of my mental health, I could not have lived in my sister's shadow, and so I went for it. I did not give up. I was pushing myself so hard to get rid of that tag. That is probably why my performances were probably decent compared to the level of experience I had at the time. It was an accelerator for me."

***Question: What was going on in your head on the last lap at Oulton Park in 2002 when you were on your way to your first British Touring Car Championship win?***
**Zeus**
**Via Twitter**
**MN:** And was your post-race action of getting out and kissing the ground pre-planned?
**PON:** "I don't want to bore your readers, but people hadn't realised what had gone on before that. I had Matt Neal as a team-mate and he was my favourite person in the world because he was the underdog if you like. I turned up at the first round and I was shit in practice, shit in qualifying but managed to get a good time in second qualifying. Then I had a puncture on the last corner and then a crash with Tim Harvey in the second race. Then at Oulton in the opener, my gearbox failed when I was eighth. In my mind, it was just never going to come together for me.

"I had all these rituals before I would get in the car – put this glove on first, don't get in the car until something else, blah, blah. I was getting stressed and I spoke to Thommo. And he said 'mate, just enjoy your f*cking racing!' I just did what he said.

"I made it into the lead and halfway through that race I was in professional-driver mode. But when I was in the lead with a handful of laps to go, it started to become a problem. It almost became like a virtual world, like I was in a dream. It was as if I was a movie. The senses are heightened – that is why you can hear all sorts of noises in the car and you think everything is about to go wrong. I felt like I was watching myself drive the car and that's when you start to lose the rhythm. As soon as I was coming down to the last corner, Lodge, on that final lap, I was on the radio to Alex [Somerset, engineer] asking 'are you sure this is the last lap?' He told me it was and to bring it home. I remember turning out of Lodge and heading to the line. There is a photo of this: every single member of the team was on the pitwall. I nearly crashed into the pitwall because I couldn't see for the swarm of people. I don't care who takes the piss out of me for crying on the podium. It was such an amazing feeling and something I will take to the grave with me. Someone might be able to win 50 more races than me and I don't care because when you come from Widnes and you didn't think you would ever get behind the wheel of a racing car, moments like that are so, so special."

***Question: Financially, what is it like being a touring car driver? Do you get paid a salary, or do you have to bring a package to a team?***
**Sean Rooney**
**Via Twitter**
**PON:** "The days of people being paid are a long time ago. I can only speak about myself. I paid to be there at Triple Eight Race Engineering – and I was on a good deal, we hammered them – through to the end of 2003. I was treated like a factory driver and I was given a £30,000 bonus at the end of the year for contributing towards the team's achievements. It cost nothing, but since then I have never, ever, paid a penny of my own money to go racing, which I am so proud of. When it comes to the deal with Tech-Speed for the BTCC, there was never any family money that came into it. It was always Marvin and Sandra Humphries bringing sponsors onboard that they introduced to me. I would get along with the money men and they knew I could drive, so there would be a deal there. Look at Tom Ingram now: he is the man for me. He will take X amount of money somewhere and he will pay himself by skimming the top off. Jason Plato does the same. The top drivers today are a businessman first and a racing driver second."

***Question: If Tech-Speed had found the budget for 2012 for a second season in the Chevrolet Cruze in the BTCC, what do you think you could have achieved results-wise?***
**Darren John Timms**
**Via Twitter**
**PON:** "I have never really said this before and it will probably upset a few people but my heart really wasn't in it in 2011. The only time I was really into it was the first round, Rockingham and then the final visit to the Brands Hatch GP track. When I was good, I was good. When I felt people didn't care – and it wasn't the team, it was some of the backers – I felt like it was going to be the end and so I didn't want to risk everything and have an accident. I had fallen out of love with it all by the time the season came to an end. There were turbocharged cars on the grid and that just upsets everything. But what do I think I could have done if there was a sponsor lined up and a turbo Chevy? I would have been better than Dave Newsham [who finished ninth in the points with two wins], and Newsham is a very, very good driver. I would have won races for Tech-Speed."

***Question: How close were you to putting something together with the Speedworks Motorsport team after you drove for them in two rounds in 2012?***
**Darren John Timms**
**Via Twitter**
**PON:** "I think Christian and Amy Dick [Speedworks bosses] and [racer and Speedworks backer] Tony Hughes were desperate for me to drive the car, especially Tony. He would love to have had a 'name' in the car, and he was a huge supporter. After the two rounds I did, I could see something that maybe other people didn't see [at the time] in my ITV career. I thought if I just hung in there, there could be a future.

"What people don't understand with me is that racing is not in my blood. It is not something that my dad put there, not something that my mum put there. It is something I liked to watch, but I never thought I would race a car or get a podium. I never thought I would win a race. If I was someone like Tom Ingram, I would have put that [potential] deal to bed. Certainly. I was happy to let other people do the hard work for me, but in the BTCC these days, the driver has to put in the hard yards and help make things happen.

"That's just the way it is. It didn't interest me and I knew I had a better chance of making a career in the media, plus I was getting old! I was 32 when all that

Photos: Jakob Ebrey

O'Neill's favourite car: The Honda Integra

Brothers arms: VX Racing talent Muller, O'Neill and Thompson

These poor, poor people: O'Neill's mum and dad aren't pictured...

O'Neill embraces 'Marv and Sandra'

**"Today's drivers deserve all the rewards"**

**Pauli O'Neill**

The ultimate BTCC car: the Tech-Speed Chevrolet Cruze in 2011

happened. I knew I couldn't do it forever."

***Question: Of all the BTCC cars you have driven, which was your favourite: a Production class car, a BTC Tourer, an Super 2000 or an NGTC car?***
**Chris Hosie**
**Via Twitter**
**PON:** "Good question, wow! I have only ever driven two NGTC cars – the Team Hard Vauxhall Insignia and the Speedworks Motorsport Toyota Avensis. I am not a massive fan of the NGTC cars from that era. They will have changed now and they are probably a lot better but my favourite car to drive, when it was driveable, was the RML Chevrolet because that was as close to a Super Tourer as I think we will probably ever get. The lap times that we see now with the NGTC cars is just [about] the power and grip they have. S2000 was on a knife edge. Driving the Honda Integra was like taking your nanna shopping. It was so easy! The Chevy was the most rewarding, but the Integra will stack up as my favourite: not for the way it drove, but because of the results we were able to achieve with it and with Tech-Speed."

***Question: How has having diabetes affected you during the pandemic and do you need to have things in place for a race weekend?***
**Suzy76**
**Via Twitter**
**PON:** "I am not a person who thinks this has been made up. I don't care how Covid has happened, but the only people I care about really are my parents. Everyone else I know is big enough and ugly enough to look after themselves – including me. I have done everything in my power to stay away from Covid because if I get it, I am in real trouble. I have never been told I need to do extra shielding, but I don't need to. I have listened to the government. I have listened to the scientists and specialists and I trust them – well, not necessarily the government! Working at the race meetings with ITV last year was the only time where I would have been likely to have been caught out. I have had differences with ITV with contracts and how they operate, but the one thing I will say is that you could not wish for a better employer to look after you in a pandemic. I have had occupational health phone calls to check on me, all sorts. You would not believe what it has been like on the inside. The ITV compound has almost been like a hospital. It has been excellent and I have never once been concerned.

"We were all kept in the compound all season. It was odd: I have never met [2020 BTCC newcomer] Jack Butel, for example, and I haven't seen Tom Ingram for a year! Josh Cook is one of my best mates, but we haven't actually seen each other since December 2019…"

***Question: What has been the highlight of your commentating career and do you have to prepare before commentating on a race?***
**Donna and Edward Bright**
**Via Twitter**
**PON:** "One of the highlights of my ITV work would be getting a phone call from [BTCC series editor at the time] Simon Parry. He had given me little fill-in jobs to do with interviews and other things, but the highlight was when he called and said there was a vacancy and would I be interested in doing it. I didn't even think. It put a real bounce in my step. At the end of the day, I never really wanted to race cars because I didn't think I could do it. Instead, I always wanted to be able to tell a story, like Murray Walker, about what was going on. I wanted to talk.

"A race that sticks in my mind was Sophia Floersch winning the double in Ginetta Junior at Thruxton in 2015. I had a lot to say that day…"
**MN:** And what about the groundwork that you do? What is your process before each meeting?
**PON:** "I will watch the round that I have commentated on before. As a co-commentator, I am only painting the picture. [Lead commentator] Richard Neil has the stats. I don't know who has won what, I just want to know what's current and I always think to myself 'what would I want to hear?' I wouldn't want a co-commentator to talk about a driver's stats, where he is from or anything like that. That's Richard's job and you expect that from him. I just look at what the form is and what they can do. I will usually know something of them, I will have coached them or met them too…"
**MN:** It does seem like you know every single person and driver in the BTCC support paddock…
**PON:** "It is weird, isn't it? But I love that, and it enables me to tell the story to those at home and show them what they have been through."
**MN:** It genuinely comes across like you support every single driver in all of the series…
**PON:** "I know what it is like to be out there. I have massive respect for any person in that paddock, whether it's Tom Ingram in the BTCC or Tom Edgar in Ginetta Juniors. Anyone who has put themselves on that grid and has tried to deliver as a sportsman deserves respect."

***Question: Who is the best driver overall in the history of the BTCC?***
**Joe Bramble**
**Via Twitter**
**PON:** "I judge everyone on Yvan Muller, and James Thompson in his heyday was unstoppable. Thommo beat him twice in the same car. I can only go off what I have seen. I didn't follow the championship in its early days. But I would say Andy Rouse and Thommo, but I would pick Thommo because of what he did to help me. There aren't that many drivers who are so focused and so in their own zone and yet still have enough time to look after someone else the way Thommo looked after me: I was just a kid from Widnes."

***Question: Which car and driver on the current grid would Paul most like to compete with [be team-mate to]?***
**Wes Hooker**
**Via Twitter**
**PON:** "A toughie, this. I would probably say Josh Cook in the Honda. Cook is a good mate and I love him to bits, and I also think that he is that fast that I would learn something from him. And that Honda is a fantastic front-wheel-drive car and I am used to that drivetrain too."

***Question: If you were a BTCC team boss and you could put two drivers in your cars with no limitations, who would they be?***
**Harry Adams**
**Via Facebook**
**PON:** "See my previous answer about Josh Cook! And also, this might upset a few people and I am not doing it because it is a gender thing, but I think Jade Edwards. Just because of the potential she has and the scope there is to make it work. I really rate her. I know the Clios that she has driven have not been the best and she's done a great job. She has been unlucky up to this point. But I would love to see her do well because I know she is good and I know how hard she works."

***Question: You have done some rallying? Is that something you would like to do more of? Why do you enjoy it so much?***
**Jack Crowther**
**Via email**
**PON:** "I love it and I would love to do more. I spoke to [McLaren GT driver] Rob Bell about this and he said to me 'why would you want to do rallying? They are just race cars that have gone off…' That did make me laugh. I love it because it is different every time you go out there, and you get so much seat time. When you can do it with one of your very good mates as a passenger and you can have a real giggle when it is all finished, it is brilliant. I love it. It is working class motorsport. It's proper sport with proper people." ■

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FEATURE

Iconic Fisher and the Subaru Impreza 555

# THE FISHER LEGACY THAT WILL FOREVER LIVE ON

**Twenty years have now passed since one of Irish motorsport's darkest days, but the mark Bertie Fisher and his family left on rallying is immeasurable. By Luke Barry**

Bertie (l) and his son Mark (r) were very well respected drivers

The winning habit: Fisher and Kennedy (r) won several Irish rallies

**The statistics speak for themselves: 20 Irish International victories – more than anybody else – and four Tarmac titles; just one short of Austin MacHale and Eugene Donnelly's joint record.**

Bertie Fisher was, without question, a superb rally driver capable of beating anybody on their day, but more than that, Bertie Fisher was simply a wonderfully personable human being whose presence in the service park continues to be missed.

January 22 is a date all of Irish motorsport wishes it could forget but likely never will. Last Friday marked 20 years since Bertie, his son Mark and daughter Emma lost their lives in a helicopter crash near their family home in County Fermanagh. Despite two decades now passing since the tragedy, they are loss is still whole heartedly felt by everybody that knew them.

Bertie's rallying career began in the late 1960s at just 18 years old, both driving and navigating in a modest Mini Cooper. From there, he switched to Ford Escort power and began to make a name for himself with several national victories in the late '70s and early '80s predominantly with Austin Frazer calling the bends. It was an Ulster Rally victory in 1982 however, a minute and a half clear of Per Eklund, that gave Fisher his big break.

Switching to an Opel Manta for 1983, Bertie was always in the mix but wouldn't win again at that level until 1987 – his final season with Opel power before reverting back to a Ford and a Sierra Cosworth for the 1988 campaign. However it wasn't until 1990, Bertie's second year in a Prodrive-built BMW M3 E30, that the long-awaited and much-deserved Irish Tarmac title would be his.

With him for the ride was Rory Kennedy who got the seat after Frazer took a step back. He'd sit there for the rest of Bertie's rallying career, though the Letterkenny man had sat in the silly seat back as a one-off in 1985 before linking up full-time.

"I was familiar with Bertie and met Bertie many times," Kennedy tells MN. "Paula – my then girlfriend who's now my wife I'm glad to say – and I had gone away for the weekend to the Cavan Rally on the Saturday. I was walking up through the service park on Sunday morning and I met one of the mechanics that looked after Bertie's car and he said 'Bertie's looking for you.' What's that about? 'I think he wants you to sit with him.'

"It turned out Austin Frazer became unavailable at very short notice. Bertie had rang my house the day before the rally, of course I wasn't there but my father reassured him that I was away to the rally and, without doubt, I would definitely sit with him. I didn't even have a rally suit so I did my rally in my jeans and sweatshirt and we went on and won the rally, my first ever win!"

It was quite the introduction to a partnership that would yield four Tarmac titles and 22 rally victories. All four were claimed with Prodrive's support, with 1992 and 1993 in a Subaru Legacy RS before the final success in 1996 with the iconic Subaru Impreza 555: "It was a huge deal for me to get the nod and become the full-time co-driver," Kennedy recalls. "I was absolutely over the moon to get the drive and it's all very well getting it, but once you get it you've got to make the best of it! In terms of raising your game, the professionalism of it was absolutely remarkable.

"At one point we were pretty much unbeatable but of course like anything you can be on top of your game but sooner or later somebody else is going to come along. But it was his attention to detail and preparation and ensuring he had the best car, best tyres, best team around him that set him apart. It meant when you went to the rally you stood every chance of winning. It was up to yourself then, he had everything else in place."

Andrew Nesbitt knows just how hard Bertie was to beat. The 2000 and 2002 Tarmac champion went head-to-head with Fisher on several occasions, and holds Bertie's final victory on the 1999 Circuit of Ireland Rally as "probably the best rally I've ever competed on" despite losing the victory himself on the final day with a puncture.

"He loved it and I loved it because the two cars were identical at the time," Nesbitt tells MN, "but also, at that point, he was very good to me. Not only was he a competitor but he was a very good friend and he had decided that he was going to be stepping back from doing championship rallying and he organised that I would take his sponsorship. So he helped me get the Subaru Ireland sponsorship, he helped get me the Pirelli tyre deal so he was unbelievable in terms of support, trying to help the young drivers.

"Probably in his eyes, he was helping me with my rallying career when it was most needed so I think when we actually got into the field of racing each other, he

Photos: Roy Dempster, Conor Edwards Photography

## REMEMBERING THE FISHER CLAN

Mark and Emma Fisher were both making huge strides in their respective fields before it was all taken away from them. Mark was an extremely competent driver who approached life with a smile. He had just been signed by Peugeot for 2001 courtesy of winning the 1999 106 Super Cup and sampling both the Acropolis and Network Q Rallies in a 206 WRC. Sadly, Mark was never able to take up that contract, but Nesbitt remembers a particularly eye-catching performance in 2000 in a Mitsubishi Lancer E5.

"He was on the up and I remember having a race with him on the Isle of Man and I was in the World Rally Car and he was in the Group N car. He was showing such talent, he was beating World Rally Cars around him in the Group N car, that's how good he was. He was obviously world championship material."

Emma meanwhile, affectionately known as 'Fish', was instrumental in establishing the Fisher Foundation that to this day continues to provide aid to third-world countries. "She did a huge amount of charitable work and was a lovely girl in the prime of her life," Kennedy says. "There was so much hope for her. It's such a tragedy the whole thing, it seems unreal even thinking about it today."

Mark on 2000 Manx Rally

The first Irish Tarmac title in 1990 at the wheel of a BMW M3 E30

Fisher was a character on the stages as well as away from them

Fisher made his name in rear-wheel-drive cars, including the Manta

enjoyed the fact he was helping me get there and I was enjoying the fact I'm racing my idol, Bertie Fisher. It was nip and tuck for all of that time, just an unbelievable experience. It's probably the best memories I have of my rallying career. For the few years after that we then moved up a gear and got the latest and the best in terms of World Rally Cars and won a couple of championships but I'd have loved if Bertie had been there to race with us.

"He knew how to psychologically control the rally, control the people around him not only from his team-mates but the competitors he was competing against," Nesbitt adds. "What I learned from Bertie through my rallying career was how to pace myself, how to control myself and also how to handle yourself when you're speaking with sponsors equally and very importantly the young people that would come into the service areas, he always had time for everyone. He always said to me if somebody's good enough to invite me to an event, I should be good enough to go. He always felt that way, and those were his exact words."

Bertie was held in similarly high regard in business life. His company Fisher Engineering garnered a reputation for being the absolute best: "He was a very, very respected businessman and he was involved in all the local authority boards," Kennedy says. "He was really a leading light in Ireland and lots of people used to come to him for advice on different projects. It was a testimony to the man; all his staff, even the fellas driving the forklift knew Bertie and called him Bertie and Bertie would know them on a first-name basis too. He was very well connected throughout his whole workforce and he was somebody who you could approach and discuss anything with and he would give you fair and honest advice. He was really a remarkable character in business, sport and family life he was an outstanding man. He was revered by many."

That led to some rather interesting evenings in his company, as Kennedy recalls one particularly entertaining night on the drive south to Killarney for the rally. The pair needed fuel, so stopped in a small village which had a petrol station and a pub adjacent to each other. "I walked into the pub and I said to the guy 'can we get some petrol?' and he said 'no problem but you'll have to wait for 10 minutes because they were playing poker in there and it was almost over," Kennedy explains. "So Bertie and I sat up in the corner of this wee country bar and this big card game was going on and the next thing the drinks started flying because people, even though they didn't say, started to recognise him so everyone was buying him drinks and we stayed up all night! There was a whole crowd around us at the end of it so it was great fun, locked into the pub!"

Nesbitt has similar tales to tell: "I remember going to a wedding and it was a very, very snowy winter wedding. Bertie was going to the wedding, as was Austin MacHale, and they were coming from two different directions. The question was: who wasn't going to make it in the snow? Bertie and [his wife] Gladys made it to the wedding and he came into the reception and says to me 'Is Austin here?' I said 'no Austin's just rung up saying he couldn't make it.' He burst out laughing saying 'well I made it!' So the competition wasn't just in the rally car! They were still competing against each other just to get to the wedding it was hilarious. I'll never forget it."

While his peers remember Bertie as a friend and a rival, to current Irish Tarmac regular Alastair Fisher he was simply uncle Bertie. Alastair has vivid memories of watching Bertie's Impreza flash past him on rallies as a young boy, and feels it's important for the family that his own rallying career has allowed the Fisher name to continue to appear on the timesheets. It's a feeling shared among the modern crop of drivers.

"Over this lockdown period there has been a lot of old videos on social media, all the old Circuit of Ireland and Ulster Rallies and Donegals and so on, that '80s and '90s era I do feel our generation looks back to that period and sees it as the golden years of rallying," Alastair tells MN. "And the competitors that were competing then are motorsport icons for a lot of my generation I feel."

Sadly for a lot of today's generation though, Bertie will remain a cult hero rather than somebody they can turn to for some good old-fashioned craic today. Rarely does a week go by that Bertie, Mark and Emma escape the thoughts of those that knew them best. While nothing can make up for their loss, the legacy they have left behind will never diminish.

"Unfortunately I remember the day clearly, the tragic accident that took place was really sad but I want Bertie and Mark and Emma to be remembered for all of their achievements, not only in motorsport but in life," Nesbitt says. "They were such good people, they were all-rounders that everyone would aspire to and look up to. I would like to live my life the way they did." ■

# JOHN McILROY

FORMER MOTORSPORT NEWS JOURNALIST

**The name Bertie Fisher was ever-present during my upbringing as a Northern Irish rally fan – although I must confess that as a Banbridge boy, I cheered more loudly for my local hero Kenny McKinstry than I did his rival from Ballinamallard.**

Still, when I joined the MN editorial team and had the call to chase up Irish rallying news, I found Bertie thoroughly professional – focused, yes, not least on organisational matters and particularly on spectator safety. But he was kind with it, and also blessed with a dry sense of humour. He never failed to take a call either, even as his family's steel engineering firm was undergoing rapid expansion.

At his core, Bertie was a fierce competitor who relished a challenge in business, or on the stages. I saw this first-hand many times, but I remember the 1996 Killarney Rally of the Lakes best of all.

In the first day's action the Fisher Impreza was harried by local man Liam O'Callaghan, driving an ex-works Toyota Celica GT-Four. The Subaru had the odd niggle, admittedly, but there was no doubt that Bertie's pace was being stretched by his younger rival. At the end of the first day, in fact, it was Liam who held the lead by a scant four seconds.

Sunday's scheduled started with Moll's Gap though – an Irish classic at the best of times, and a potentially decisive moment in the battle between the front pair. I made my way to the stop control, hoping to catch some early-morning drama.

First on the road, O'Callaghan covered the 13 miles in 10 minutes and 13 seconds. As he pulled up to the finish-line marshals, he didn't look particularly unhappy with that pace – until he glanced in his rear-view mirror and saw a flash of blue already approaching the finish. The Toughmac Impreza covered the stage in just nine minutes and 59 seconds – making Bertie the first man ever under the 10-minute mark for Moll's Gap.

As the stop-line team fed the time through to his co-driver Rory Kennedy, the intensity on Bertie's face was a sight to behold – a world away from the smart suit and the Fisher Engineering boardroom. You could see, in the space of a few seconds, why he savoured the release of driving so much. He was so pumped up, in fact, that I can remember he accidentally slipped the clutch to get away to the next stage, bundling over a tyre engineer who was checking temperatures and pressures.

Losing 14 seconds in one fell swoop was a devastating blow, and O'Callaghan knew it. Bertie duly romped to victory – his sixth in Killarney – by almost half a minute.

The mix of that talent behind the wheel and the professionalism of his approach made Bertie Fisher a formidable force in Irish rallying for a generation. The awful events of the afternoon of January 21 2001 brought that era to a jarring, painful end – and denied the wider sport the ongoing influence of a decent, honourable human being, a competitor who was feared and respected in equal measure.

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FEATURE

# THE BIRMINGHAM SUPERPRIX PROJECT: KEEPING A SPECIAL RACE ALIVE

## How do you sustain memories of a unique and revered part of UK motorsport history? The Birmingham Superprix Project is doing just that, as Graham Keilloh discovers

Project gathers memories of UK's rare city street race

The archive is shared with fans at various events

The project has produced clothing and even fresh artwork

**Andrew Smallman is a self-described "proud Brummie". He's also a fully-paid-up member of a motorsport-passionate family. So when it comes to the Birmingham Superprix, the glorious street race held in the UK's second city between 1986 and 1990 for Formula 3000, the Formula 2 of its day, he might seem an obvious candidate to be a big fan.**

But there was a snag. Smallman was mere months old when the final ever Superprix was held.

"My sister Amy used to race stockcars in Birmingham," Smallman tells Motorsport News, "and every time we'd go through the city centre to where she'd race, Birmingham Wheels, I'd always remember my dad telling me about this race that happened in the city.

"This was about 2006, 2007, so YouTube and information about it isn't quite readily available on the internet just yet and it's hard to find any documentation. So it just sort of lived in my head for a few years."

Then Smallman made a breakthrough. "I came across a book in a local shop about it," he continues, "so I picked it up and I couldn't quite believe the scale of this thing that had happened. My dad, he'd undersold it to me! I was just blown away.

"And I immediately jumped on to YouTube so I could see any footage available and then I was just blown away on a completely new scale. I worked for a couple of years in Highgate which was one of the roads on the circuit, I couldn't quite believe that I walked around these streets."

He didn't leave it at that. "At the exact same moment something told me something needs to be done about this, about the history of this race."

It's little wonder Smallman found the Birmingham Superprix captivating. This was no speed event nor a race in a park on similar. This was proper street circuit racing, near the city centre. The sort that, on the UK mainland anyway, tends to exist strictly in pipe dreams.

Aptly the race's existence required two decades of effort – including of the particularly determined variety by Martin Hone – plus regular town-centre racing car parades with haughty motorsport names, and an Act of Parliament.

"I wanted to know more than what was in the book, I wanted to know more about the footage that I was finding, who has more footage, who has more images etc," Smallman recalls. "There needed to be more available for future generations to see and to also to give back to the older generations that were there."

The book that captured Smallman's imagination was by co-written by David Page, who from 2002 had worked on his own archive of race memories. In 2014 he and Smallman combined efforts. The Birmingham Superprix Project was born.

"The number one priority is to collect and either restore or archive memorabilia, photos, videos, digitise them," Smallman explains of the project. "That is the heart and soul [of the project], our digital archive, there are thousands of images, documents, hours of footage from amateur footage through to the professional footage that was run on Central TV and various other channels."

Smallman thought interest in contributing would be selective, but he's been "blown away" by the sustained response. "The project's grown so organically now and so naturally we just get tagged in so much," Smallman explains. "We'll still ask people, but nine times out of 10 people are tagging us in things and sending stuff in, word of mouth, it just keeps growing." Lockdown has also been good for it, getting the fruits of people clearing out lofts and the like.

The project's also had specific sources of help, including from none less than aforementioned Superprix driving force Hone. "Martin's opened his archives up to us," Smallman says, "[he's] very excited to hear that a young group of people are interested, he took us to his storage units. And we haven't even put out a quarter of the photos on social media that Martin's given us access to that are just incredible."

They've also got help from Dave Lucas, who was head of Birmingham City Council's Superprix team. "Dave has helped us out again many times in the

Photos: Dave Lucas, John Clewer, Martin Hone, Duncan Hands, Jakob Ebrey

Fangio awaits parade start...

**"They all remember it fondly, spectators to drivers"**

**Andrew Smallman**

Superprix legend Martin Hone opened his archives for the project

past, he's given us a great network of people to approach and help grow our archive," Smallman notes.

"There was a photographer from the event, John Clewer. John was commissioned by the council to photograph every year that the Superprix ran and John's been a great part of the project. He's given us boxes of slides and with money we've been able to raise we were able to buy the equipment needed to convert these slides to digital to archive them. He was given triple-A [event] passes, so his photos are really exclusive."

The photography quality across the board has stunned Smallman too: "You are looking at a photo from the '80s but because of the high quality you could easily mistake it as a photo that was taken this year. That's been fascinating to see how much care people have taken."

Smallman even so has some favourites. "There's one but it wasn't from the Superprix itself [it's from a mentioned pre-event parade], it's a beautiful photo of Fangio," he notes, "and the best thing about it is it's, I don't want to say out of context, but if you're from Birmingham you know exactly where it is, it's right outside St Martin's church outside the Bullring [shopping centre]. It was such a beautiful crystal-clear black-and-white photo of Fangio sat there just waiting for the parade to start.

"There is [another] one and again it is from the parade, it's from the drivers' briefing. It's Fangio who is next to Jack Brabham who's stood next to [Nigel] Mansell. They are stood in what is from Monday to Saturday normally a veg market! It just speaks volumes."

Photos have been high quality

Having established the archive, there was then the matter of sharing it. "We were then able to start building a social media presence across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter, which I've pushed ever since," Smallman says. The project has a combined social following of 6800.

The project also shares what it has found at various live events, including people and even cars that were involved in the races. Damon Hill and Tim Harvey among others have also given support.

The events have also confirmed that Smallman is far from alone in being one from the next generation who is fascinated by the Superprix. This was noted by one event guest Phil Andrews who, as well as being a local, entered the Superprix three times and finished seventh in 1989.

"It [the attendees' ages] was across the board," Andrews tells MN, "it was amazing. A lot more younger people than I expected, there was a lot of youth interest.

"From Andy's point of view he's really getting his head around some of the 'how the hell did this happen in Birmingham all those years ago!' He's got a fantastic archive now, the project has done a fantastic job."

The project has also done collaborations, including producing a special Superprix 30th anniversary ale, working with a clothing company and even producing branded artwork. There's also a podcast series for sharing first-hand memories, with another three episodes released soon.

And, in something Smallman never envisaged, the project also helped West Midlands mayor Andy Street when he was recently seeking to revive the Superprix as a Formula E race, by putting him in touch with people who developed the original event.

As for the future, Smallman hopes for more of the same, with more events when restrictions allow, with more cars on display, and restored in Superprix liveries, plus more collaborations and, of course, more for the archive. Smallman muses about a circuit guided tour as well.

"The biggest thing is to continue to educate, inform people of this event and cement its history," he outlines.

"They all remember it fondly, that's the thing. Spectators to drivers, they look back and they realise how special this event was because it hasn't happened ever again since." ■

## What made the Birmingham Superprix special

In seeking to understand the Birmingham Superprix and just why it gets the affection that it does, that it is distinctive would act as a handy catch-all. Yet this extends even beyond the base extreme distinction that it was a modern-era UK downtown street race. Plenty more made it inimitable.

Bernard Cottrell was one of the Superprix's senior British Racing and Sports Car Club officials. "I looked after the paddock area which was in the fruit market," he recalls, "and Thursday and Friday when we were building up it was still being used as a fruit market! We converted the Bristol Street Motors [dealership] showroom into the pits area, we had the Marlboro hospitality bus to use as the pits office..."

Formula 3000 competitor Phil Andrews, as a local from five miles away, had his own share of bizarre moments. "We brought the car onto the grid, I think this was '89, from the recce laps and [I] hopped out, undoubtedly I was looking for somewhere to go for a pee," he recalls. "And walking back towards the pitlane I just bumped into a bunch of old school mates! I was taking my helmet off, it was like 'Phil! Phil!'"

"The atmosphere was amazing," Cottrell adds, "there was a real carnival atmosphere over the race weekend."

Then there was the layout. "My first impression of the circuit was just 'wow this is quick for a street circuit'!," Andrews enthuses. "Quick and bumpy are the first two words that spring to mind! In qualifying we were doing 178mph going into the hairpin, which for a street circuit *was* bloody quick!

"It was quite challenging, it flowed quite nicely, whoever designed the circuit did a fantastic job."

The event had its share of ill luck with weather – as well as disgruntled locals removing barrier bolts – in the first visit, then with two restarts in '88. Yet organisationally the event was strong. "By '89, '90 the organisation was absolutely fantastic," Andrews recalls. "I remember the public roads were back open again within two hours of the last race finishing."

Andrews: local competitor

Cottrell: still talk of comeback

"It took a lot of logistics," Cottrell adds, "we seemed to spend a hell of a lot of time up in Birmingham. It wasn't easiest thing but we congratulated ourselves that we were first to do that. I don't think things like the Coventry Speedfest are anything like that..."

And, of course, there's the big question. Can the Superprix return? "A lot of people ask me if it will come back," Andrews notes, "I would certainly like to see it because in hindsight it did a lot for the city, both economically and from an image point of view. I don't think that was fully appreciated until it had finished."

However money was a major reason the Superprix stopped. And, on these grounds, Cottrell is sceptical about a comeback. "We reckon it would be in excess of £15 million to put it on now, with the road closures," he says.

"Would I like to get involved if it was ever run again? Yes. I must have been to 15 or 20 meetings in Birmingham from people that are very enthusiastic amateurs that want to get it going again, but I just don't think they realise the sort of money that's needed.

"I think they're dreamers, but you always go to these meetings because the one you don't go to will be the one where the bloke's got the money..."

A truck sits incongruously in a residential area – typical Superprix!

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# GETTING OVER THE LINE

## TECHNICAL COLUMN PROVIDED BY WITHAM MOTORSPORT – DISTRIBUTORS OF MOTUL AUTOMOTIVE LUBRICANTS

*How the Motul Racing Lab provides an essential service – even in the desert...*

The Motul Racing Lab truck follows the hundreds of competitors across the entire Dakar Rally event

Detailed analysis can prevent an engine failure

The on-event service is a mobile workshop

**Clairvoyants rely on tarot cards or tea leaves to predict the future. But at Motul, there are more scientific ways of working out what might happen.**

The Motul Racing Lab is a rolling laboratory where Motul's experts can spot future mechanical problems and help riders and teams get to the end of a race through an analysis of their machine's lubricants. Motul scientist Celine Danion has just returned from this year's Dakar, one of the toughest events on the planet, and tells us how this lab really makes the difference between a failure or a win.

### What is the Motul Racing Lab?

**Celine Danion:** "The Motul Racing Lab is a mobile laboratory that analyses, live and on-site, the lubricants from all parts of the machine (engine, transmission, differential). The lab is installed in a truck, allowing us to travel almost anywhere on the globe, like following the Dakar, which we've just returned from: almost two weeks in the middle of the desert."

### What is the benefit of the Motul Racing Lab to the Dakar competitors?

**CD:** "The machine is one of the key elements to finish the Dakar. It must travel several thousand kilometres in the most extreme conditions. The state of the engine and transmission is not visible to the naked eye. One of the ways to find out is by analysing the oil that passes through all the parts. Over the years competitors have discovered the advantage of having this kind of information after each stage, which can detect problems and prevent a failure in some cases."

### Can you describe the process? What are you looking for when you test the oil?

**CD:** "The Motul Racing Lab uses three devices: a spectrophotometer, which detects and quantifies all types of elements. The main goal of this device is to detect the wear elements that indicates if there is abnormal wear in engine parts. The second is a viscosimeter, which measures the viscosity, the main property of the oil. And the third one is an infrared device that determines if the oil is oxidised and if there is contamination. All these devices require a little amount of oil and the analysis takes less than five minutes. We print a report of the results of all this and give this to the competitor."

### What sort of things do you discover from the analysis?

**CD:** "Most often we can see that, from the viscosity, there is fuel dilution. We can also see if there is an abnormal amount of a wear element like iron, copper or aluminium. This indicates which engine parts are wearing out. We can also see the amount of sand in the oil and detect a problem with an air filter. If we found some engine coolant it indicates that there is a problem with a coolant circuit or, in the worst case, with the cylinder head gasket. If the oil is too oxidised it indicates the oil needs to be changed more often."

Drivers and riders tackle thousands of kilometres

### Are competitors surprised by the results?

**CD:** "They are often surprised by the quantity of information we can provide on the engine state by a simple oil analysis. If there is a problem, most of the time the team suspected it, and the oil analysis confirmed this. But in other cases, they are very surprised. For example, in this Dakar, a team asked us to do an analysis of their used oil thinking that all was OK, but we found a high amount of engine coolant and suspected a cylinder head gasket crack. They were very surprised. They have could fixed the problem and finished the Dakar."

### Do the teams make changes based on the results?

**CD:** "Yes, they do. We don't just give the results, we also help them to fix problems, talking with them and finding out what is the origin of the problem. But the final decision is theirs. We've seen through this Dakar that competitors listen to us and follow our advice."

### Does having this insight help lead them to success?

**CD:** "Yes. I like to believe it does. When analyses are good, it reassures the teams, and they are then more confident for the rest of the course. When the results are bad, they are grateful to have that information and have a chance to fix it before it's too late. Finally, the Motul Racing Lab is not only a device. There is also a team around it that provides real technical support to teams and works hard to try and help them to finish and even win an event like the Dakar Rally. The Motul Racing Lab is not just for show."

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COLUMNIST

# MATT JAMES

## MN editor looks at Jason Plato's influence on the 2021 BTCC merry-go-round

Photos: Momentum Social, Jakob Ebrey

Plato (l) and Ingram in flight

Ingram has a shiny new Hyundai agreement

**The British Touring Car Championship announcements keep on coming thick and fast. It has been one of the most interesting closed seasons for many years, with drivers flitting between teams and new cars in build.**

Among the announcements, the bombshell news has been that Tom Ingram has switched his allegiance to the Excelr8 Motorsport team to drive one of its Hyundai i30 Fastback N Performance machines for 2021. That is a very exciting move. Ingram has clearly seen the potential in the South Korean car, which first hit the tracks last season.

But more than what's happening with the hardware and on the circuits, the move says a lot about how Ingram is positioning himself in the championship now. During the announcement of the new deal between Ingram and Excelr8 Trade Price Cars Racing, the two-time Independents Trophy winner was effusive in his praise for Jason Plato (who, coincidentally, has confirmed his return to the category this week with the Power Maxed Racing team to chase a third career BTCC crown).

Plato has made the BTCC his business model and, despite the speedbump of last year's turbulent season, has been a constant. The BTCC fits Plato's brand perfectly, and he knows it. He has previously told MN that racing on a global platform has very little interest for him commercially, because the UK companies who support him would not get exposure on these shores.

Ingram is following the 97-time race winner's thinking. "For me, Jason Plato has always been the blueprint in the BTCC," he explains. "The mentoring I received from him as part of the KX Akademy [in 2012] just under a decade ago transformed the way I approach my racing."

Plato's energy drinks backer KX – part of the Tesco group of products – created a bursary to help support up-and-coming talent. The premise was simple: the pot of cash would be used to support and galvanise young stars who had already started their on-track journey. It would top-up any funding rather than stand it all, and then the bolt-on bonuses would be mentoring time with Plato. Those lessons included how to make a career out of motorsport, and this is where Ingram's ears pricked up and the then-Ginetta racer, who was cementing his reputation in the GT Supercup through 2012 and 2013, listened carefully. Ingram reflects: "In focusing on building [Plato's] brand, he has proved how it is possible to forge a tangible, long-lasting career in British motorsport both on and off-track – and I would like to think I could see myself in his shoes another decade or two down the line."

Former team-mate Ash Sutton admires Plato

A guiding hand: Ingram and Plato back in 2013

Those background factors were what was behind Ingram's team switch. Speedworks and Ingram had grown together in their BTCC journey from their first steps together in 2014. The team was finding its feet in the category, and Ingram was a freshman. But they went on to some amazing success and the cusp of the crown in 2018. But Ingram's commercial requirements with his major backer Ginsters and Speedworks' direction of travel with its factory Team Toyota GB deal didn't align. There was no rancour, no backbiting, just a genuine affection for the legwork both had put in and a pat on the back as each wished the other a successful future. The mutual platitudes were quite unusual for a motorsport paddock.

Reigning champion Ash Sutton, too, has held Plato up as a template of how he would like to see his career pan out. He isn't daunted about Plato's incredible strike rate of wins, and the 27-year-old is already one fifth of the way there with 19 victories from his first five seasons in the tin-top top-flight. "He is there to be beaten," says Sutton. "And if Jason can hit the sort of numbers he can, then why can't anyone else? Besides, if I get there, it will mean I have had a long and successful career in the BTCC. Surely that is everyone's aim?"

While Plato might now be the elder statesman of the British Touring Car Championship, the career template that he set himself is something that is firmly on the radar of the drivers in his slipstream. Plato might have burned a few bridges across his BTCC career, which stretches back to 1997, but he is still a guiding light for so many.

*Ingram: "I'd like to be in Jason Plato's shoes a decade or two down the line"*

# WHAT'S ON

## YOUTUBE

Focus: Gilbert-Scott

If UK downtown street racing, and moreover UK street racing for Formula 1's direct feeder series, seems a surreal concept, that's because it is. And on YouTube there's a 25-minute documentary called Street Legal that gives apposite insight into 1986's inaugural, other-worldly, Birmingham Superprix.

The programme's surreal air starts with following Formula 3000 driver Andrew Gilbert-Scott literally from his morning alarm (or rather, from a spooky sequence of him doing a Stig impression on a Birmingham shopping street, presumably meant to represent his fever dreams...).

The documentary combines on-track, on-board and behind-the-scenes footage, and brings home what a radical departure the event was, particularly in its organisation. Gilbert-Scott and team are seen housed in the Bristol Street Motors forecourt used as pits, among incongruous signs for used cars and the like. We also, among other things, get to view the claustrophobic drivers' briefing featuring a few familiar faces.

Things go well initially for Gilbert-Scott as he qualifies third. But then, again somehow in keeping, Hurricane Charley's tail hits the race. Gilbert-Scott calls the conditions "the worst I've ever driven in". Still, we got a race. Of sorts.

You can watch it all at youtube.com/watch?v=yAABvm_T0SQ or you can search '1986 – Birmingham Superprix – Street Legal with Andrew Gilbert-Scott'.

**Graham Keilloh**

## TV GUIDE

Eurosport will show 2020 British GT highlights

Throughout a period where an increasing number of us find ourselves at home much more, whether that be on furlough or working from home instead of the office, TV has become an important reprieve.

Unfortunately for us motorsport fans, there isn't a huge array of brand-new motorsport content this week but there is still plenty to see in the next seven days, starting with a review of last week's Rally Monte Carlo on ITV4 (Thursday, 2000hrs-2100hrs).

The review-style programmes continue during and after the weekend, with a look back at the 2020 European Rally Championship on Monday (1200hrs-1300hrs) on Eurosport 2, swiftly followed by a review of last year's World Touring Car Cup (1300hrs-1400hrs) and then a digest of this year's Dakar Rally late on Monday evening (2300hrs-0000hrs). A 2020 British GT season highlights programme will air on Eurosport 1 on Saturday (1730hrs-1800hrs).

If you haven't seen Sky Sports F1 in-depth The Race to Perfection series, the broadcaster is offering you the chance to catch it with all seven episodes airing on Sunday. Episodes 1-4 will be shown consecutively (1235hrs-1800hrs) before episodes 5-7 are screened later (1930hrs-2345hrs). The series is wrapped around by the Live Virtual Grand Prix Austria (1800hrs-1930hrs).

If you're keen to learn more about the new Extreme E series, watch a preview explainer programme on BT Sport 3 on Tuesday (2000hrs-2100hrs).

**Luke Barry**

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Photographs must be of a good quality and please send no more than three images

ART EDITOR MIKE STOKOE'S FAVOURITE OF THE WEEK!

Justin Ward's superb photo of a Lancia saving some budget when it comes to tyre wear

Nick Padmore in flight, photo by Gary Hill

Gary Hill's photo of Ricky Parker-Morris

More classic rally action, from Chris Noble

David Harbey's picture of a Lotus leading

A Nissan in full flight, from Justin Ward

## NEXT WEEK

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**EDITORIAL**
**Editor:** Matt James
**Tel:** 07884 117139
**Email:** Matt.James@kelsey.co.uk

**Deputy Editor:** Graham Keilloh
**Tel:** 07973 829291
**Email:** Graham.Keilloh@kelsey.co.uk

**Reporter:** Luke Barry
**Tel:** 07456 856800
**Email:** Luke.Barry@kelsey.co.uk

**Art Editor:** Mike Stokoe
**Tel:** 07957 282340
**Email:** mikestokoe@gmail.com

**Digital Content Producer:** Helena Hicks
Helena.Hicks@kelsey.co.uk

**Contributors**
**Rallying Editor:** Graham Lister
**Historics Editor:** Paul Lawrence
**Rallycross Editor:** Hal Ridge
**Columnist at large:** David Addison
**Columnist and track tester:** Andrew Jordan
**Technical Editor:** Carl Faux

**ADVERTISING**
Tandem Media Ltd.
**Account Director:** Richard Rowe
**Email:** richard@tandemmedia.co.uk
**Tel:** 01233 228757

**Account Manager:** Peri Smith
**Email:** perianne@tandemmedia.co.uk
**Tel:** 01233 228753

**PRODUCTION**
Tandem Media Ltd.
**Ad Production Manager:** Andy Welch
**Email:** mn@tandemmedia.co.uk
**Tel:** 01233 220245

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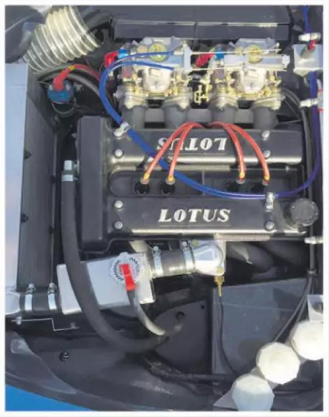


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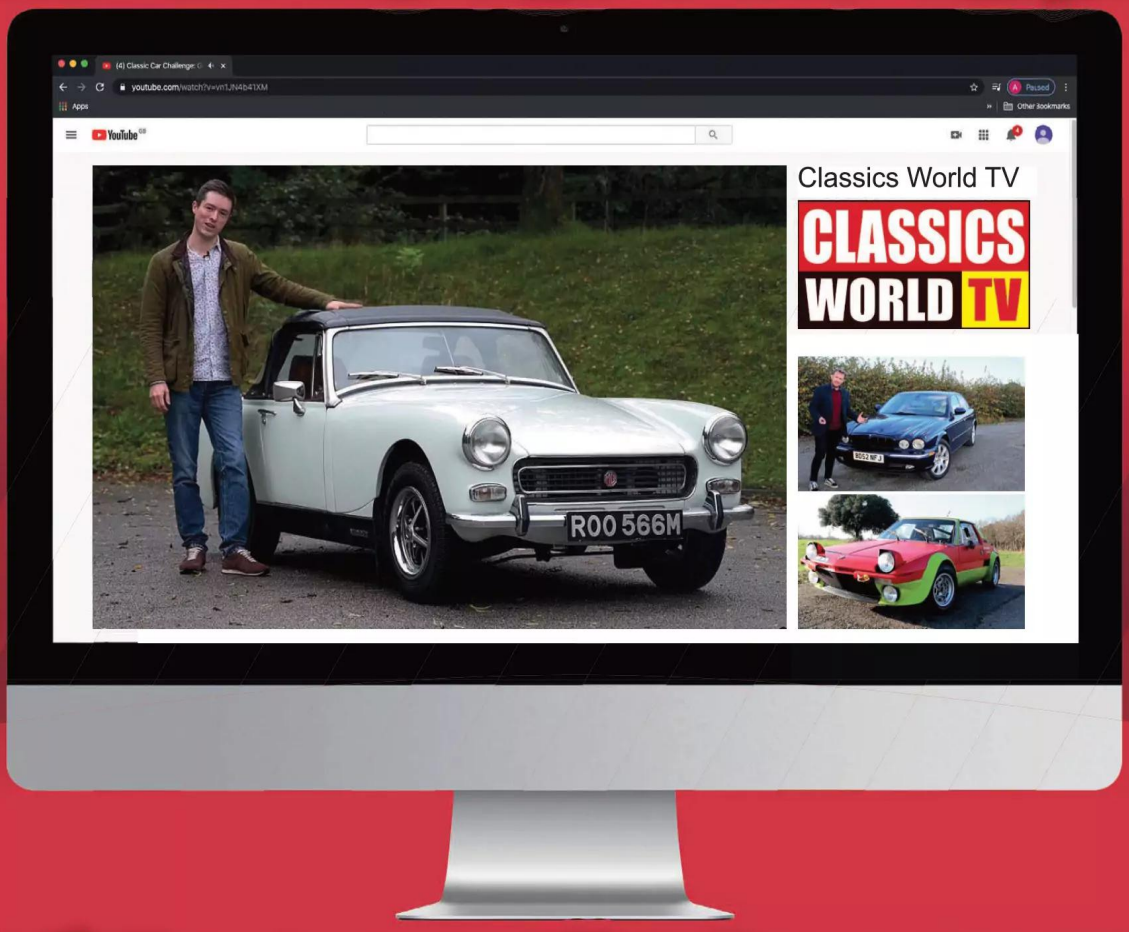


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## THIS CLASSIFIED SECTION WAS BROUGHT TO YOU BY:

**Richard Rowe**
Account Director
T: +44 (0) 1233 228 757
E: richard@tandemmedia.co.uk

**Peri Smith**
Account Manager
T: +44 (0) 1233 228 753
E: perianne@tandemmedia.co.uk

**Andy Welch**
Advert Production Manager
T: +44 (0) 1233 220 245
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